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The Origins and Development of Samm Araha Meditation

From Phra Mongkhon Thepmuni (Sot Candasaro) to Phra Thep Yan Mongkhon (Sermchai Jayamagalo)

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The Origins and Development of Sammā Arahāṃ Meditation:
From Phra Mongkhon Thepmuni (Sot Candasaro) to Phra Thep
Yan Mongkhon (Sermchai Jayamaṅgalo)

Potprecha Cholvijarn

A dissertation submitted to the University of Bristol in accordance with the requirements
for award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of Arts, School of
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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines Sammā Arahaṃ meditation from its origin in the figure of Phra Mongkhon Thepmuni (Sot Candasaro), the late abbot of Wat Paknam, Thonburi, as well as its transmission to Phra Thep Yan Mongkhon (Sermchai Jayamaṅgalo), the late abbot of Wat Luang Pho Sot Thammakayaram, Ratchaburi, in the context of the history of Theravāda Buddhist meditation practices.

The second chapter of this dissertation analyses Luang Pho Sot Candasaro's autobiography, his sermons, the teachings of two of his meditation teachers, namely Luang Pho Niam Dhammajoti (Wat Noi, Suphanburi) and Luang Pho Nong Indasuvanno (Wat Amphawan, Suphanburi), and the meditation traditions of Saṅgharāja Suk Kai Thuean (Wat Ratchasittharam, Thonburi) and Wat Pradusongtham (Ayutthaya). It confirms that Luang Pho Sot has taken and adapted aspects of these teachers' and traditions' meditation practices and incorporated them into Sammā Arahaṃ meditation. The second chapter also seeks to clarify further the relationships of Luang Pho Sot's Sammā Arahaṃ meditation to the so-called *borān kammaṭṭhāna* tradition such as the meditation manual of King Taksin of Thonburi and other manuals preserved in the anthology, *Phuttharangsi Thritsadiyan book of samatha and vipassanā meditation of the four reigns*.

The third chapter accounts for the development of various lineages, networks and centres of Sammā Arahaṃ tradition after the death of Luang Pho Sot, with an emphasis on Achan Sermchai and Wat Luang Pho Sot Thammakayaram. The chapter also considers two meditation masters whose teachings and practices were influenced by Luang Pho Sot and Sammā Arahaṃ meditation, namely Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam, the founder of the Manomayiddhi meditation tradition, and *Bhikṣuṇī* Voramai Kabilsingh, who and taught Sammā Arahaṃ along with four other meditation systems.

The fourth chapter examines and analyses Achan Sermchai Jayamaṅgalo's works. The dissertation argues that Achan Sermchai's works provide a defence of the thought and practice of his tradition, which consists of demonstrating that they conform to Theravāda canonical and commentarial tradition. In his elaboration of Luang Pho Sot's teachings, Achan Sermchai's works can also be characterized as an attempt to reinterpret and systematize Sammā Arahaṃ meditation. Moreover, in the fourth chapter, I gather opinions and discussions from different lineages of Sammā Arahaṃ tradition regarding two particular issues: 1) the existence of a prior five-body system in Luang Pho Sot's teaching; and 2) the practice of offering food to the Buddha in (*āyatana*) *nibbāna*. This is to demonstrate that among the various lineages of Sammā Arahaṃ tradition, there are differing interpretations regarding aspects of Sammā Arahaṃ practices. This section also includes my interview with *mae chi* Wanchai Chukon, founder of the Suan Kaeo Meditation Centre, Ratchaburi, and one of the few living direct pupils of Luang Pho Sot.

I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the University's *Regulations and Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes* and that it has not been submitted for any other academic award. Except where indicated by specific reference in the text, the work is the candidate's own work. Work done in collaboration with, or with the assistance of, others, is indicated as such. Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author.

SIGNED...Potprecha Cholvijarn.....DATE...7/11/2019.....

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ABBREVIATIONS OF PĀLI TEXTS

(references are normally to vol., page, and line unless otherwise specified)

A	Āṅguttaranikāya, ed. R. Morris, E. Hardy, PTS London 1885–1900
Ap	Apadāna, ed. M.E. Lilley, PTS London 1925–27
Bv	Buddhavaṃsa, ed. N.A. Jayawickrama, PTS London 1974 (by poem and verse)
D	Dīghanikāya, ed. T.W. Rhys Davids, J.E. Carpenter, PTS London 1890–1911
Dhp	Dhammapada, ed. O. von Hinüber, K.R. Norman, PTS Oxford 1994 (by verse)
Dhp-a	Dhammapada-aṭṭhakathā, ed. H.C. Norman, PTS London 1906–14
Dhs	Dhammasaṅgaṇī, ed. E. Müller, PTS London 1885
It	Itivuttaka, ed. E. Windisch, PTS London 1889
It-a	Paramatthadīpanī (Itivuttaka-aṭṭhakathā), ed. M.M. Bose, PTS London 1934–36
Khṇ	Khuddakapāṭha, ed. H. Smith, PTS London 1951
Ja	The Jātaka together with its commentary, ed. V. Fausbøll, London 1877–96
M	Majjhimanikāya, ed. V. Trenckner, R. Chalmers, PTS London 1887–1902
Paṭis	Paṭisambhidāmagga, ed. A.C. Taylor, PTS London 1905–07
Paṭis-a	Saddhammappakāsinī (Paṭisambhidāmagga-aṭṭhakathā), ed. C.V. Joshi, PTS London 1979
Ps	Papañcasūdanī (Majjhimanikāya-aṭṭhakathā), ed. J.H. Woods, D. Kosambi, I.B. Horner, PTS London 1933–38
S	Samyuttanikāya, ed. L. Feer, PTS London 1884–98
Sn	Suttanipāta, ed. D. Andersen, H. Smith, PTS London 1913 (by verse)
Sp	Samantapāsādikā (Vinaya-aṭṭhakathā), ed. J. Takakusu, M. Nagai, PTS London 1924–47
Spk	Sāratthappakāsinī (Samyuttanikāya-aṭṭhakathā), ed. F.L. Woodward, PTS London 1929–37
Sv	Sumaṅgalavilāsinī (Dīghanikāya-aṭṭhakathā), ed. T.W. Rhys Davids, J.E. Carpenter, PTS London 1886–1932
Th, Thī	Theragāthā and Therīgāthā, ed. H. Oldenberg, R. Pischel, 2nd edition, with Appendices by K.R. Norman, L. Alsdorf, PTS London 1966 (by verse)
Th-a	Paramatthadīpanī (Theragāthā-aṭṭhakathā), ed. F.L. Woodward, PTS London 1940–59
Ud	Udāna, ed. P. Steinthal, PTS London 1885
Ud-a	Paramatthadīpanī (Udāna-aṭṭhakathā), ed. F.L. Woodward, PTS London 1926
Vin	Vinayaṭṭhaka, ed. H. Oldenberg, London 1879–83
Vism	Visuddhimagga, ed. C.A.F. Rhys Davids, PTS London 1920–21
Vv	Vimānavatthu, ed. N.A. Jayawickrama, PTS London 1977 (by poem and verse)

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Chapter One

1. Introduction

Luang Pho Wat Paknam, Phra Mongkhon Thepmuni (Sot Candasaro) or Luang Pho Sot, as he is commonly known, is one of the most influential Buddhist meditation masters of twentieth-century Thailand.¹ Luang Pho Sot (1884–1959) was born in Suphanburi province in the reign of King Rama V (1868–1910). In 1916, he was appointed abbot of an old and half-abandoned temple called Wat Paknam, located in the Phasicharoen district of Thonburi, Bangkok. At Wat Paknam, Luang Pho Sot introduced, developed and popularized a meditation system called *Sammā Arahaṃ*, named after the Pāli words that represent the Buddha's qualities recited at the basic level of this meditation. It is also known as the *Dhammakāya* meditation system or *Witcha Thammakai* in Thai.² During his 43 years as the abbot of Wat Paknam, Luang Pho Sot developed this small temple as a centre of meditation and scriptural studies, attracting many Thai and foreign monks as well as lay students and practitioners. His reputation spread across Thailand and he became one of the country's best-known monks. After his death in 1959, the *Sammā Arahaṃ* meditation system was handed down by his pupils and different lines of transmission have emerged

¹ *Luang Pho* means 'venerable father' in Thai. Sometimes he is also called Luang Pu Sot or 'venerable grandfather'. In this dissertation, I use the Royal Institute of Thailand's guide for romanizing Thai words. For proper names, I use conventional romanizations, and for Buddhist concepts, Pāli and Thai. For names of monks, after giving their full monastic titles, Pāli and given names, for the rest of the dissertation, I use the most commonly known names, for example, Luang Pho Sot, Achan Man, Somdet To, Achan Sermchai etc. When I refer to the Pāli canon, its commentaries and the *Visuddhimagga*, I give the volumes and page numbers of the Pali Text Society editions. With regard to quotations of these canonical and commentarial texts, I am translating into English the Thai translation of the Pāli, unless indicated otherwise.

² Luang Pho Sot used both names to refer to his meditation system. However, I find that using 'Dhammakāya' or 'Thammakai' can be misleading as it is also the name of the controversial Dhammakaya Temple in Pathum Thani, which is one among many temples that practise this meditation system. As this dissertation does not focus on that temple, I shall refer to this meditation system as *Sammā Arahaṃ*.

over the last six decades. Today, it is practised at many monasteries and meditation centres in Thailand and abroad: for example, at Wat Paknam and its associated centres, the controversial Dhammakaya Temple³ and its associated centres, and Wat Luang Pho Sot Thammakayaram.

At Wat Luang Pho Sot Thammakayaram, Ratchaburi province, one of the three main centres of the Sammā Arahaṃ meditation tradition in Thailand, this meditation tradition was propagated by its late abbot Phra Thep Yan Mongkhon (Sermchai Jayamaṅgalo) or, as he was commonly known, Achan Sermchai (1929–2018).⁴ Achan Sermchai, informally referred to as Luang Pa (Venerable Father/Dad), was a monk of the Mahānikāya lineage⁵ who was the abbot of Wat Luang Pho Sot Thammakayaram from 1991 to 2018. Born in 1929 in Buriram province, the grandson of a civil servant and the son of a farm owner, Achan Sermchai received his bachelor's and master's degrees at Thammasat University, Bangkok, and worked as a research specialist at the United States Information Services, Bangkok, and as a special lecturer at Bangkok and Thammasat Universities. In 1970, he was introduced to Buddhist meditation, which changed the course of his life and eventually led him to enter the monkhood in 1986 at the age of 57. Over a relatively short period of time, he has built his reputation as a meditation master and a scholar of Buddhism. Sammā Arahaṃ meditation was transmitted to Achan Sermchai through Phra Ratchaphromathen (Wira Gaṇuttamo), the late deputy abbot and the head of meditation at Wat Paknam and a

³ This is how the temple spells its name in the Roman alphabet.

⁴ *Achan* in Thai means 'teacher'. Sermchai is how he spells his name in the Roman alphabet.

⁵ One of the two monastic lineages of the Thai *saṅgha*. The other lineage is called Thammayut (Thammayuttika/Dhammayuttika) *nikāya*.

direct pupil of Luang Pho Sot. Other lineages in this tradition include that of the late *mae chi* Chan Khon Nokyung (1909–2000), a female renunciant and direct pupil of Luang Pho Sot who, together with her students Phra Dhammajayo and Phra Dattajīvo, founded the Dhammakaya Temple.⁶

With a unique background of research and meditation and work both in Thailand and in the United States, Achan Sermchai produced many original works in Thai and in English on Theravāda Buddhist doctrines and practice covering a wide range of topics such as meditation, *nibbāna*, *dhammakāya*, *āyatana (nibbāna)*, magic and supernaturalism, Buddhist relics, politics, governance, law, education, development and Buddhism as a state religion of Thailand.⁷ He was also known for his outspokenness and charisma, and also for his amulets.⁸ It was due to Achan Sermchai's amulet that I became interested in Buddhism and Sammā Arahaṃ meditation.

I have known Achan Sermchai since I was a child. My parents often took me to visit him at Wat Luang Pho Sot Thammakayaram to make merits on their birthdays and on Buddhist national holidays. My initial interest in Sammā Arahaṃ meditation stemmed from an accident that occurred in 1988, when I was aged seven. I was travelling around the UK

⁶ For biographical information on *mae chi* Chan Khon Nokyung, see Dhammakaya Temple (2013).

⁷ Regarding meditation, *nibbāna*, *dhammakāya*, *āyatana (nibbāna)*, see Sermchai (1995, 1999, 2003, 2009, 2010 and 2013); regarding Buddhist relics, magic and supernaturalism, politics, governance, law, education and development, see these collections of online articles and video recordings: Sermchai (2019) and Wat Luang Pho Sot Thammakayaram (2019); and regarding Buddhism as a national religion, see Sermchai (2007).

⁸ An amulet is an object believed to be endowed with powers to protect and bring good fortune. Some of the common types of amulets in Thailand are small Buddha images, votive tablets and coins with images of monks, deities and past monarchs.

with my grandparents and my parents. One morning, as we were leaving our flat in London, I sprinted ahead of my parents to cross the road to get into our car and, without noticing the traffic lights, was hit by a speeding car. According to my parents, the impact was so strong that my body flew a couple of metres forward. My grandfather almost fainted as he thought that I was going to die. The ambulance was called and I was rushed to the nearby hospital. After a lengthy examination and X-rays, to everyone's great surprise, I was not at all harmed. There were no broken bones, no blood clots, not a single internal injury, and only a few minor bruises. I could even walk back to the car and the next day was able to run around Regent's Park with the same enthusiasm. My parents believed that it was due to Achan Sermchai's amulet, which I wore around my neck, that had saved me. From then on, my parents and I became more interested in Sammā Arahaṃ meditation and in Buddhism in general. When I was thinking of pursuing a PhD in Buddhist Studies, Sammā Arahaṃ meditation and Achan Sermchai became the most obvious topics. I could use my experience in practising Sammā Arahaṃ meditation and my long acquaintance with Achan Sermchai to shed light on the tradition and contribute to the field.

In this dissertation, I will examine and analyse the Sammā Arahaṃ meditation from its origin in the figure of Luang Pho Sot, as well as its transmission to Achan Sermchai, via Phra Ratchaphromathen (Wira Gaṇuttamo), in the context of the history of Theravāda Buddhist meditation practices. The dissertation attempts to answer the questions of how and why Luang Pho Sot developed Sammā Arahaṃ meditation, and through its transmission to Achan Sermchai, how and why the practice changed and developed over the six decades after Luang Pho Sot's death. I hope to contribute to a better understanding

of modern Thai Buddhism and meditation from the beginning of the twentieth century to the present.

With regard to the origins of *Sammā Arahaṃ* meditation, I have taken as my starting point the SOAS PhD thesis of Catherine Newell (2008). Her research, and that of Mettanando Bhikkhu (1998), pointed me towards the anthology *Phuttharangsi Thritsadiyan book of samatha and vipassanā meditation of the four reigns*⁹ published in 1935, and in particular, the meditation system of Saṅgharāja¹⁰ Suk Kai Thuean (1733–1822) found in it. The 1935 (BE 2478) anthology was compiled and edited by Phra Mahājotipaṇṇo (Chai Yasothonrat) (1897–1963) of Wat Boromniwat, Bangkok, a Thammayut temple,¹¹ under the supervision of the abbot, Phra Upāli Khunupamachan (Chan Siricando) (1857–1932) (Chai 1935), and provides a glimpse of the various meditation practices found in Thailand¹² and Laos prior to the nineteenth century. One of the stated authors of one meditation system contained in the anthology, Saṅgharāja Suk Kai Thuean, is a well-known figure in Thai history and his meditation method is believed to have been the dominant form of meditation in Bangkok during the reigns of Rama I (1782–1809), Rama II (1809–1824), Rama III (1824–1851) and Rama IV (1851–1868) as Saṅgharāja Suk is said to have taught meditation to all four kings of the House of Chakri (Wira 2012: 27). Saṅgharāja Suk was invited by Rama I from Ayutthaya to the newly established Bangkok to be the head of meditation¹³ and in 1819

⁹ หนังสือพุทธรังษีอภิชัยญาณ ว่าด้วยสมณะและวิปัสสนากัมมัฏฐานสี่ยุค.

¹⁰ Supreme Patriarch, the head of the Thai *saṅgha*.

¹¹ Thammayut (Thammayuttika/Dhammayuttika) *nikāya* is one of the two monastic lineages of the Thai *saṅgha* founded by King Mongkut (Rama IV) in 1833. The other lineage is called *Mahānikāya*.

¹² Prior to 1939, the country was called Siam.

¹³ พระราชาคณะฝ่ายวิปัสสนาธุระ ‘Phra Rachakhana Fai Wipatsanathura’. Phra Rachakhana is the third-highest rank in the Thai *saṅgha*, below the Supreme Patriarch and Somdet Phra Rachakhana. ‘Fai Wipatsanathura’

became Supreme Patriarch by order of King Rama II. Mettanando (1998) was the first scholar to introduce the Chai Yasothornrat anthology to Western scholarship. His 1998 Hamburg doctoral dissertation presented English translations of some parts of it, including Saṅgharāja Suk Kai Thuean's meditation manual. It was Newell who first linked Saṅgharāja Suk Kai Thuean's meditation system to Sammā Arahaṃ meditation and provided evidence that Luang Pho Sot borrowed and adapted ideas and practices from Saṅgharāja Suk Kai Thuean's meditation system in developing Sammā Arahaṃ meditation.

In her analysis of Saṅgharāja Suk's manual in the anthology, Newell (2008: 209) finds similarities between his system, the Sri Lankan *Yogāvacara's manual* (Woodward 1916) and the characteristics of the so-called *borān kammaṭṭhāna* tradition (also sometimes referred to as *yogāvacara*), which I shall discuss below in detail. According to Newell's comparison of Saṅgharāja Suk and Sammā Arahaṃ meditation, both systems make use of the *sammā arahaṃ* mantra, the bodily bases and the vision of luminous spheres (Newell 2008: 256). The bodily bases are different points within the body that serve as resting places for the mind. In both systems, bright spheres are visualized entering the body via the nostril and down to the navel area via the bodily bases, which are located along the breath passage. *Sammā arahaṃ* are Pāli words that represent the qualities of the Buddha and are recited during meditation. Newell visited Wat Ratchasittharam, Thonburi, where Saṅgharāja Suk's system (also called the Kammathan Matchima Baep Lamdap system) is still practised and

means that the monk is recognized as a meditation teacher and is responsible for overseeing the practice of meditation (*vipassanādhura*).

taught. There, she was informed by Luang Pho Wira Ṭhānavīro (Phra Khru Sitthisangwon), the meditation instructor and lineage holder, that Luang Pho Sot had studied at the temple and adopted aspects of Saṅgharāja Suk’s system into Sammā Arahaṃ meditation.

Prior to Newell’s research, in the preface to Bizot’s *Les traditions de la pabbajja en Asie du Sud-Est* (1988: 10), Bechert suggested a connection between the *borān kammaṭṭhāna* (*yogāvacara*) tradition and Sammā Arahaṃ meditation. This connection is also pointed out by Crosby (2000: 153) in her article ‘Tantric Theravāda: A Bibliographic Essay on the Writings of François Bizot and others on the Yogāvacara Tradition’. Bowers’ *Dhammakāya meditation in Thai society* had suggested similarities between various aspects of Sammā Arahaṃ meditation and Tibetan tantric practices (Bowers 1996: 33–45): for example, the diagram of the six elements within the *dhamma* sphere in Sammā Arahaṃ meditation and the *maṇḍala* of the cosmic Buddhas in the Tibetan tradition; the usage of the bodily bases in Sammā Arahaṃ meditation and the usage of *cakras* of/similar to the Tibetan tradition; the concept of bodies within bodies in Sammā Arahaṃ meditation and the tantric idea of the ‘the Five Sheathes’ etc. He suggested the possibility that Luang Pho Sot may have come across some Tibetan practices while studying at Wat Phra Chetuphon (Wat Pho), Bangkok, and incorporated them in formulating Sammā Arahaṃ meditation (Bowers 1996: 45). Mackenzie (2007: 108) finds Bower’s suggestion ‘just within the realms of possibility’. However, there is no evidence to support such claims (Mackenzie 2007: 108). Mackenzie (2007: 113) goes on to discuss the *borān kammaṭṭhāna* (*yogāvacara*) tradition, citing Crosby’s summary (2000: 141–2) of its distinctive features, and pointing out the commonalities between some of its practices and Sammā Arahaṃ

meditation. He suggests that some Sammā Arahaṃ borrowing from the *borān kammaṭṭhāna* tradition is possible, and more likely than Tibetan influences (Mackenzie 2007: 113).

The second chapter of this dissertation attempts to provide further answers to the question of the origins of Sammā Arahaṃ meditation, starting from where these scholars left off. Its focus is on the analysis of Luang Pho Sot's autobiography, his earliest sermons, the meditation teachings of two of Luang Pho Sot's teachers, namely Luang Pho Niam Dhammajoti and Luang Pho Nong Indasuvanno, and the meditation tradition of Wat Pradusongtham, Ayutthaya. The chapter incorporates my interviews with Luang Pho Wira Ṭhānavīro and Achan Daeng (Prayok Niamnet), meditation teachers and lineage holders at Wat Ratchasittharam and Wat Pradusongtham, respectively. It seeks to clarify further the relationship of Luang Pho Sot's Sammā Arahaṃ meditation to the earlier forms of meditation practice indicated in the Chai Yasothonrat anthology and to the so-called *borān kammaṭṭhāna* tradition.

Achan Sermchai and Wat Luang Pho Sot Thammakayaram are only mentioned briefly in Western Buddhist Studies literature: e.g. Bowers (1996), Mackenzie (2007) and Catherine Newell (2008).¹⁴ Bowers (1996: 66–76) mentions Wat Luang Pho Sot Thammakayaram in his discussion of the various temples that practise Sammā Arahaṃ meditation. Mackenzie

¹⁴ See also Martin Seeger (2009: 12–14) who mentions Achan Sermchai's book *The principle of examination of nibbāna-dhātu according to the words of the Buddha and the aṭṭhakathā* in the context of the Thai 'nibbāna: self (*attā*) or not-self (*anattā*)?' debates and controversy, which reached their zenith in the year 1999.

(2007: 38–9) provides a short account of the inception and history of Wat Luang Pho Sot Thammakayaram in his study of the Dhammakaya Temple and Santi Asoke.¹⁵ Newell (2008: 118–120) mentions Achan Sermchai and Wat Luang Pho Sot Thammakayaram in her description of the various temples of Sammā Arahaṃ tradition in order to point out that there is not a single uniform Sammā Arahaṃ movement, but rather various temple networks. Mackenzie, Bowers and Newell discuss Sammā Arahaṃ meditation and provide analyses. Their descriptions of Sammā Arahaṃ meditation, Mackenzie’s and Bowers’ in particular, rely mainly on Achan Sermchai’s English summary ‘*The heart of Dhammakaya meditation*’ (Sermchai 1991). Newell’s description, in addition to Achan Sermchai’s book, also relies on the Dhammakaya Temple’s websites. Bowers and Mackenzie incorporated their interviews with Achan Sermchai into their accounts of Wat Luang Pho Sot Thammakayaram. Newell did not meet Achan Sermchai, but met and interviewed Phra Khru Baitika Barton Ñāṇadhīro (1936–2011), an American monk who was ordained at Wat Luang Pho Sot in 2002. The three scholars make the distinction between the meditation systems taught at Wat Luang Pho Sot and that taught at Dhammakaya Temple, all concluding that at Wat Luang Pho Sot, higher levels of meditation are encouraged by the abbot than at Dhammakaya Temple, which focuses mainly on the basic technique for the masses. Mackenzie (2007: 231) makes an observation that Achan Sermchai’s approach seems to be ‘exoteric’, in that ‘he refuses to guard esoteric knowledge of high-level meditation’. This is due to the concern that a lack of disclosure could lead to the meditation system’s demise and disappearance (Mackenzie 2007: 231). Newell (2008: 233) adds that

¹⁵ Santi Asoke is an alternative Buddhist group established by Phra Phothisak in 1975. The group distinguishes itself from the mainstream Thai *saṅgha*. It emphasizes forest dwelling and a rejection of materialism and consumerism. Its followers include Chamlong Srimuang, the former governor of Bangkok.

at Wat Luang Pho Sot, the abbot encourages his visitors to gain higher levels of attainment and expects them to reach the level of *dhammakāya* during the temple's retreats. However, apart from using his writings as a basis for their accounts of Sammā Arahaṃ meditation and comparing Wat Luang Pho Sot's approach to meditation practice with that of the Dhammakaya Temple, none of these scholars go into detail regarding other aspects of Achan Sermchai's thought and practice as their research either focuses on Dhammakaya Temple or the Sammā Arahaṃ tradition as a whole. Achan Sermchai's substantial works have, therefore, been almost entirely neglected by both Thai and Western Buddhist studies. This is surprising considering the number of studies conducted on the Dhammakaya Temple, which is, in fact, only one among many Sammā Arahaṃ lineages. As I shall show in the fourth chapter, Achan Sermchai's work provides a defence of the thoughts and practice of his tradition, which consists in demonstrating that it conforms to Theravāda canonical and commentarial tradition, and the views of respected Thai monks. This is done to counter criticisms that Sammā Arahaṃ meditation is heterodox, not in accordance with the Pāli canonical and commentarial texts, and provides only the *samatha* (and not the *vipassanā*) aspects of meditation. In his elaboration of Luang Pho Sot's teachings, Achan Sermchai's works can also be characterized as an attempt to reinterpret and systematize Sammā Arahaṃ meditation. This can be seen clearly in his development of what I term the 'four-tier *satipaṭṭhāna* practice'. This chapter incorporates not only the most important works by Achan Sermchai but also three interviews I conducted with him in 2015, 2016 and 2017.

The third chapter of this dissertation consists of a section regarding Luang Pho Sot's influence outside the Sammā Arahaṃ tradition, in which I consider two meditation masters whose teachings and practices were influenced by Luang Pho Sot and Sammā Arahaṃ meditation: 1) Phra Ratchaphromyan (Wira Thāvaro) or, as he is popularly known, Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam (Black Monkey Sage), the founder of the so-called Manomayiddhi meditation tradition; and 2) *Bhikṣuṇī* Voramai Kabilsingh, the first Thai woman to have received ordination from both the male and the female *saṅgha* and the founder of the Songdhammakalyani monastery, Nakhon Pathom. *Bhikṣuṇī* Voramai practised and taught Sammā Arahaṃ meditation along with four other meditation systems throughout her life. This section also discusses Phra Ariyakhunathan (Pusso Seng), a renowned meditation master in Achan Man Bhūridatta's forest tradition¹⁶ and the author of *Book of divine power*,¹⁷ whose teaching and practice may have been influenced by Luang Pho Sot and Sammā Arahaṃ meditation. Moreover, in the fourth chapter, I gather opinions and discussions from individuals whom I view as representatives of the different lineages of Sammā Arahaṃ tradition regarding two particular issues: 1) the existence of a prior five-body system in Luang Pho Sot's teaching; and 2) the practice of offering food to the Buddha in (*āyatana*) *nibbāna*. This is to demonstrate that among the various lineages of Sammā Arahaṃ tradition, there are differing interpretations regarding aspects of Sammā Arahaṃ practices. One of the individuals interviewed in this section is *mae chi* Wanchai

¹⁶ Achan Man Bhūridatta (1871–1949) was a Thammayut monk, meditation master and the founder of the modern forest tradition and is today widely revered as an *arahant*. His students include Achan Waen Sucinno (1888–1985), Achan Maha Boowa (1913–2011), Achan Cha Subhaddo (1918–92), Achan Fan Acaro (1898–1977), Achan Thet Thetrangsi (1902–94) and Achan Lee Dhammadharo (1907–61) who themselves became well known and widely venerated Buddhist teachers.

¹⁷ หนังสือพิพยอำนาจ.

Chukon, the founder of the Suan Kaeo Meditation Centre, Ratchaburi, and one of the few remaining teachers in this tradition who studied directly with Luang Pho Sot. Obtaining *mae chi* Wanchai's opinions proved to be a difficult task. I had to visit her at Wat Paknam three times in order to gain her confidence and get her to speak about her views on these issues. I also faced similar difficulties with regard to Luang Pho Wira Ṭhānavīro at Wat Ratchasittharam and had to visit him three times before he was willing to elaborate on certain aspects of Saṅgharāja Suk Kai Thuean's meditation system.

Chapter Two

2. The origins of Sammā Arahaṃ meditation

Without Phra Mongkhon Thepmuni (Sot Candasaro), the late abbot of Wat Paknam, Phasicharoen district, Thonburi, there would be no Sammā Arahaṃ, Thammakai (Thai) or Dhammakāya (Pāli) meditation tradition.¹⁸ All of the lineages of the Sammā Arahaṃ tradition, with over 180 associated temples and centres in Thailand and all over the world, owe their existence to Luang Pho Sot Candasaro. Luang Pho Sot introduced, developed and popularized this unique meditation system by incorporating the different meditation practices taught by some of his renowned teachers and also through his own understanding of important discourses of the Pāli canon (Pāli: Tipiṭaka; Thai: Phra Traipidok).

This chapter focuses on Luang Pho Sot, beginning with the accounts of his life followed by an outline and analysis of Sammā Arahaṃ meditation. One of the main questions I want to answer in this section is how Luang Pho Sot's understanding of the important discourses in the Pāli canon, such as Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta (D II 290) and Ānāpānasati Sutta (M III 78), and Buddhaghosa's Visuddhimagga¹⁹ influenced his development of this meditation system. The second part of the chapter focuses on traditional Theravāda meditation, the so-called '*borān kammaṭṭhāna*' (old/ancient meditation) tradition. This tradition was first brought to the attention of Western scholars through the publication of *The Yogāvacara's*

¹⁸ Luang Pho Sot used both names to refer to his meditation system. In this dissertation, I shall refer to this system as Sammā Arahaṃ.

¹⁹ The Path of Purification, treatise and meditation manual composed by Buddhaghosa c. fifth century C.E.

manual of Indian mysticism by T.W. Rhys Davids and the works of François Bizot on Cambodian Buddhism. Aspects of this tradition are found in practices and texts throughout mainland Southeast Asia and Sri Lanka and are found in Sammā Arahaṃ meditation. The research of Newell (2008) confirms that a Thai meditation system belonging to this tradition, namely the Saṅgharāja Suk Kai Thuean system, influenced Luang Pho Sot's development of Sammā Arahaṃ meditation.

Furthermore, this chapter also discusses the teachings of two of Luang Pho Sot's meditation teachers, Luang Pho Niam Dhammajoti (Wat Noi, Suphanburi) and Luang Pho Nong Indasuvanno (Wat Amphawan, Suphanburi), and the meditation tradition of Wat Pradusongtham, Ayutthaya. Luang Pho Niam and Luang Pho Nong, whom Luang Pho Sot visited prior to moving to Bangkok, were well-respected meditation masters from Suphanburi province and teachers of many well-known monks such as Luang Pho Pan Sonando, Wat Bang Khonom, Ayutthaya and Phra Ratchaphromyan (Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam), Wat Tha Sung, Uthai Thani. Wat Pradusongtham was an important *borān kammaṭṭhāna* centre during the Ayutthaya period whose meditation manuals and living tradition have been preserved up to the present day. This research confirms that aspects of Luang Pho Niam and Luang Pho Nong meditation teachings and the meditation tradition at Wat Pradusongtham were taken and adapted by Luang Pho Sot and incorporated into Sammā Arahaṃ meditation as well. With regard to Wat Pradusongtham, my interview with Achan Daeng (Prayok Niamnet, 1950–), a lay meditation teacher and one of the lineage holders of the tradition, confirms that Luang Pho Sot took up residence and studied

meditation under a renowned lay meditation master, Achan Chap Suwan (1883–1958), at Wat Pradusongtham, Ayutthaya, prior to developing Sammā Arahaṃ meditation.

2.1 The life of Luang Pho Wat Paknam, Phra Mongkhon Thepmuni (Sot Candasaro)

This section concerns the life of the Venerable Phra Mongkhon Thepmuni (Sot Candasaro). It highlights important biographical events that made the most impact on his early career as a monk. The accounts here are largely based on Luang Pho Sot’s autobiography, first published posthumously in 1964, and the biography written by Saṅgharāja Somdet Phra Ariya Wongsakhatayan (Pun Puṇṇasiri) of Wat Phra Chetuphon (Wat Pho) (1896–1974), the 17th Supreme Patriarch of Bangkok, first published shortly after Luang Pho Sot’s death in 1959. Both of these biographies are found in the book of compilation of Luang Pho Sot’s teachings titled *Biography, works and a compilation of 63 sermons of Luang Pho Wat Paknam Phra Mongkhon Thepmuni (Sot Candasaro)*.²⁰

The four-page autobiography (63 sermons 1984: (1)–(4)), which covers the period from Luang Pho Sot’s childhood to his first meditative attainment of *dhammakāya*, is an important source of information for the origins of Sammā Arahaṃ meditation as it sheds

²⁰ชีวประวัติ ผลงาน และรวมพระธรรมเทศนา ๖๓ กัณฑ์ ของ หลวงพ่อวัดปากน้ำ พระเดชพระคุณ พระมงคลเทพมุนี (สด จนฺทสโร). Apart from the two biographies and 63 sermons, the 952-page collection also contains the biography of Luang Pho Sot written by Phra Ratchaphromathen (Wira Gaṇuttamo), a summary of Luang Pho Sot’s meditation teaching titled คู่มือสมาธิ (*Abbot’s handbook*), the biographies of important students of Luang Pho Sot and essays on *dhammakāya* and amulets by Achan Sermchai. It was published in 1984 on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of Luang Pho Sot’s birth by the Dhammakaya Meditation Institute at Wat Paknam. Not to be confused with the Dhammakaya Foundation, the Dhammakaya Meditation Institute, founded by Achan Sermchai and his teacher Phra Ratchaphromathen (Wira Gaṇuttamo), the late deputy abbot and head of meditation at Wat Paknam, is the precursor to Wat Luang Pho Sot Dhammakayaram. For the rest of the dissertation, I shall refer to this book as the ‘63 sermons’ collection.

light on Luang Pho Sot's own account of his decision to become a monk, his Pāli education, his meditation training and his initial interest in the Mahāsatiṭṭhāna Sutta.²¹ The second biography by Somdet Pun Puṇṇasiri ((5)–(42)) is the first biography of Luang Pho Sot to cover his whole life. Somdet Pun was Luang Pho Sot's nephew and meditation student. Among all of Luang Pho Sot's biographers, Somdet Pun had known Luang Pho Sot the longest. As a teenager, he travelled to Bangkok and stayed at Wat Pho with Luang Pho Sot while the latter was studying there, and was ordained at the same temple, Wat Songphinong, Suphanburi, by the same preceptor as Luang Pho Sot. He maintained a close relationship with Luang Pho Sot throughout his life. After Luang Pho Sot died, Somdet Pun acted as the temporary abbot of Wat Paknam from 1959 to 1965. These two biographies, written in Thai and as yet untranslated into a European language, which the later biographies rely on, have not been mentioned before in any Western academic work on Luang Pho Sot. Newell's thesis, which devotes a whole chapter to Luang Pho Sot, relies on: 1) Phra Terence Magness's (Suratano Bhikkhu) *The life and teaching of Chao Khun Mongkol-Thepmuni and the dhammakāya*, first published in 1960; 2) the Dhammakaya Foundation's *Life and times of Luang Phaw Wat Paknam*, published in 1998; 3) Wat Luang Pho Sot's *Biography and works of Luang Pho Wat Paknam, Phra Mongkhon Thepmuni (Sot Candasaro)* (Saman 2000); and 4) Ampai Tansomboon's 2004 MA thesis. Rory Mackenzie's (2007: 30–36) seven-page section on Luang Pho Sot mentions the Dhammakaya Foundation's biography as a source, whereas Rachelle M. Scott's (2009: 66–70) and Jeffrey Bowers' (1996: 9–10) shorter summaries rely on the Dhammakaya Foundation's and Achan Sermchai's *The heart of Dhammakaya meditation* (1991),

²¹ The page numbers of the first part of the book including all the biographies are in brackets.

respectively. These Western academic works mostly rely on later biographies in English, especially that of the Dhammakaya Foundation. These accounts, although providing adequate descriptions of his life, are summarized and translated from older biographies and other people's first-hand accounts, and do not concentrate on the first three decades of Luang Pho Sot's life. Phra Magness knew Luang Pho Sot personally, but his acquaintance with him was limited to one single year as he first visited Wat Paknam in 1958, one year before Luang Pho Sot's death. Ampai Tansomboon's thesis is the only academic work in English that relies on a biography written by a long-term acquaintance of Luang Pho Sot, namely Tritha Niamkham's *Tritha told stories about Luang Pho and Wat Paknam*.²² A much-revered figure at Wat Paknam, Achan Tritha is a female lay meditation teacher who has been living at Wat Paknam since 1939 up to the present and studied meditation under Luang Pho Sot during the last two decades of his life. Her biography is particularly informative concerning that period and regarding Wat Paknam during the period following Luang Pho Sot's death up to the year of publication (1984). However, with regard to Luang Pho Sot's childhood and early career as a monk, Achan Tritha relies on and quotes extensively from Somdet Pun's biography.

Luang Pho Sot is one of the most widely respected Buddhist meditation masters of twentieth-century Thailand. The Sammā Araham meditation system that he developed is now widely practised at many temples and centres in Thailand and abroad. These include:

²² ตริธาเล่าเรื่องหลวงพ่และวัดปากน้ำ. Published in 1984 to mark the 100th anniversary of the birth of Luang Pho Sot, her 287-page biography of Luang Pho Sot is the lengthiest among all the biographies. Apart from the actual biography, which covers from pages 53 to 184, the rest of the book consists of an introduction, photographs of Luang Pho Sot and Wat Paknam, Luang Pho Sot's meditation teaching and the history of Wat Paknam after Luang Pho Sot's death up to the year of publication.

1) Wat Paknam and its Thai and foreign branches, such as Wat Mongkhon Thammakayaram (Chiang Rai), Wat Suan Lamyai (Lamphun), Wat Sombun Thammakayaram (Phichit), Wat Pa Charoen Thammakai (Roi-et), the Suan Kaeo Meditation Centre (Ratchaburi), Wat Mongkhon Thepmuni (Philadelphia, USA), Wat Paknam (Chiba, Japan), Wat Paknam (Tauranga, New Zealand), Wat Paknam (Ohio, USA) and Wat Paknam (Michigan, USA); 2) Dhammakaya Temple, which has over 50 branches and centres in Thailand and 130 all over the world; 3) Wat Luang Pho Sot Thammakayaram; 4) Wat Mongkhonthep (Chachoengsao), and others. His amulets are much sought after and fetch a very high price. His photographs and images are put up in houses, malls, restaurants and cars for auspiciousness and protection.

Luang Pho Sot was born in 1884 in Songphinong district, Suphanburi province, and died in 1959 at Wat Paknam, Thonburi. He was ordained in 1905 at the age of 22 at Wat Songphinong, a temple that was near his family's house, and received the ordination name of Candasaro Bhikkhu.

From the information in the autobiography and Somdet Pun's biography, three particular incidents are highlighted as making the most impact on Luang Pho Sot prior to developing Sammā Arahāṃ meditation. Firstly, a fear of being attacked and killed by robbers on a boat travelling from Nakorn Chaisri (Nakorn Pathom province) to Suphanburi, which is featured prominently in the autobiography (*63 sermons* 1984: (1)–(2)). Out of the four pages, the autobiography devotes one and a half to this incident. The significance of this incident is that it caused Luang Pho Sot to reflect on the danger and hardship of living a lay life and

to make the decision to enter the monkhood. He relates this incident to his father's untimely death:

My ancestors did this [traded rice by boat] as well as my father, and now I. Where are my ancestors and my father now? They are all dead, and I too must die. When I thought of death, my mind was full of fear. I thought of death, which, without question, will surely come. I will surely die. My father, while travelling and getting out of the rice boat, felt pain along this same route. He died only a few days after getting off the rice boat. When he died, I, who was nursing him, saw that he could not take anything with him. The clothes he was wearing, and his body, which I looked after, did not disappear. Even I, my siblings, who belonged to him, and my mother, were still there. There was nothing that went with him. He truly went alone, and so will I (63 sermons 1984: (2)).²³

When I came to my senses, I got up, lit some incense and prayed that I will not die before I get a chance to ordain. If I ordain, I will not disrobe for the rest of my life (63 sermons 1984: (2)).²⁴

²³ ปุรพชนต้นสกุลของเราก็ก่อนมาดังนี้ เหมือนๆกันจนถึงบิดาของเราแล้วตัวเราบัดนี้ ก็บัดนี้ปุรพชนแลบิดาของเราไปทางไหนหมด ก็ปรากฏแก่ใจว่า ตายหมดแล้ว แล้วตัวของเราเล่าก็ต้องตายเหมือนกัน แต่พอคิดถึงตายขึ้นมาดังนี้แล้ว ใจก็ซึกเสียวๆ นึกถึงความตายที่จะมาถึงตัวโดยไม่มีสงสัยเลย เราต้องตายแน่ๆ บิดาเรามาส่องข้าขึ้นจากเรือข้าก็เจ็บมาจากตามทางแล้ว ขึ้นจากเรือไม่กี่วันก็ถึงแก่กรรม เมื่อถึงแก่กรรมแล้ว เราที่ช่วยพยาบาลอยู่ ไม่ได้เห็นเลยที่จะเอาอะไรติดไป ผ้าที่นุ่งแลร่างกายของแก่ เราก็ดูแลอยู่ไม่เห็นมีอะไรหายไป หิ้งตัวเราแลพี่น้องของเราที่เนื่องด้วยแก่ตลอด ถึงมารดาของเราก็ออยู่ไม่เห็นมีอะไรเลยที่ไปด้วยแก่ แก่ไปผู้เดียวแท้ๆ ก็ตัวเราเล่าก็ต้องเป็นดังนี้.

²⁴ แต่พอรู้สึกตัวขึ้นมา ก็รีบลุกขึ้นจัดรูป อธิษฐานในใจตัวเองว่า ขออย่าให้เราตายเสียก่อน ขอให้บวชเสียก่อนเถิด ถ้าบวชแล้วจะไม่สึกตลอดชีวิต.

These two related incidents, which greatly affected the young Luang Pho Sot, not only allude to Prince Siddhartha's remorse upon seeing the Four Sights (in particular, the sick man and the corpse), but also shed light on the hardships and working conditions of the rice merchants of Suphanburi at the time (*63 sermons* 1984: (2)).

In order to better understand these two incidents, Luang Pho Sot's decision to become a monk and his subsequent move to Bangkok, which were major factors contributing to his development of *Sammā Arahaṃ* meditation, I would like to provide a brief historical background to the first two decades of Luang Pho Sot's life. The first part concerns the perception of Suphanburi during the reign of King Rama V (1868–1910), and the second, some of the major events that affected Thailand during that period.

Luang Pho Sot was born and grew up in a province that was considered one of the most perilous in the country. Suphanburi has historically been regarded as a remote and lawless province. Abandoned for many years after the sacking of Ayutthaya in 1767, it has been one of the less accessible provinces, covered with dense forests, and out of the reach of the Bangkok administration. During the reign of King Rama V, Suphanburi was known throughout the country as a province of corrupt officials, fearsome bandits and powerful local spirits. Prior to Prince Damrong Rajanuphap's visit in 1892, members of the Thai royal family were warned not to visit the province for fear of being attacked and cursed by local spirits (Saowalak 2017a).²⁵ Prince Damrong, defying these warnings, arrived in

²⁵ Prince Damrong Rajanuphap (1862–1943) was the son of King Mongkut (Rama IV) and half-brother of King Chulalongkorn (Rama V). He was responsible for the reforms of the Thai educational system and

Suphanburi to discover that the corrupt governor, Phraya Sunthon Songkhram, had taken all of his belongings and fled in fear of being arrested (Saowalak 2017a). King Chulalongkorn, wishing to travel to Suphanburi in 1904, had to be assured by Prince Damrong that the local spirits would not cause him to ‘go insane’ (Saowalak 2017a). Without proper law enforcement, robberies and other crimes were also widespread at that time. In 1934, the Chinese owner of a market, Talat Kaohong, whose wife had been murdered by bandits, erected a tower especially designed with an impenetrable wall punctured by small holes for him to spot and shoot these criminals with his rifle (Piyanai 2017a). It became one of the few places in Suphanburi that was never robbed. Today the tower stands as a historic monument of Suphanburi’s former reputation as a lawless province (Piyanai 2017a).

In 1902, all of Thailand’s educational goals were examined and a completely different administrative structure was devised. King Chulalongkorn handed over the responsibility for curriculum development to his brothers Prince Damrong and Prince-Patriarch Wachirayan Warorot; the latter was the abbot of Wat Bowonniwet. They were in charge of formulating the contents of modern textbooks. These were modelled on European sources, but where necessary, Thai perspectives were added. With regard to the *saṅgha* education, laws were passed creating a centralized and hierarchical monastic system modelling that of the state administration. The monastic education system was enforced by means of standardized curricula, monastic degrees, titles and ranks. From the early twentieth century

provincial administration during the reign of King Rama V (1868–1910). He was also a prolific scholar of Thai history and archaeology.

up to the present day, the monastic curricula followed those set by Prince-patriarch Wachirayan.

It was quite common for young men living and working in the provinces in the early twentieth century to seek out monkhood as a means of avoiding the hardships of lay life. Perhaps lured by the westernizing and modernizing conditions, an improving quality of life and security in Bangkok, and also the prospect of being formally educated, studying the ‘modern’ curricula and receiving monastic rankings, Luang Pho Sot, like many others, made a decision to be ordained and later move to Bangkok. As I shall argue below, these changes also help to explain why Luang Pho Sot was interested in studying and translating the Pāli *suttas*, in particular, the Mahāsatipatṭhāna Sutta. At the same time, he was also drawn to meditation monks and meditation systems that offered not only the means to attain *nibbāna*, but also protective and healing skills. These skills later proved essential many times in his life, such as when he survived an attempted murder and, during World War II, when many poor and sick people sought shelter and healing at Wat Paknam.²⁶

The third incident, which is also emphasized in the autobiography, is Luang Pho Sot’s possession of palm-leaf manuscripts of the Mahāsatipatṭhāna Sutta at Wat Songphinong shortly after his ordination. The autobiography states that the *sutta* became so significant to Luang Pho Sot that when he went to Bangkok to study Pāli, he made it his goal to be able to translate the *sutta* into Thai (63 *sermons* 1984: (3)). Having reached this goal in the

²⁶ Achan Tritha’s account (1984: 62, 81, 132–156, 142 and 223–4) is most informative on these matters.

11th year after his ordination and being ‘satisfied’ with his understanding of the *sutta*, he discontinued his Pāli studies and focused solely on meditation (*63 sermons* 1984: (3)).

Before I went to study the scriptures [*ganthadhura*], I obtained a bundle of palm-leaf manuscripts of the Mahāsatipatṭhāna Sutta at Wat Songphinong. This time, in going to study, I had to be able to translate this manuscript so as to be satisfied. If I could not translate it, I would not stop studying. In the 11th *pansa* [year of ordination], I was able to translate it, and so I stopped. When I stopped learning the scripture [*pariyatti*], I started practising seriously. (*63 sermons* 1984: (3))²⁷

This account is also mentioned in the biography written by Phra Ratchaphromathen (Wira Gaṇuttamo), the late deputy abbot and head of meditation at Wat Paknam and Achan Sermchai’s teacher (*63 sermons* 1984: (46)), but it is not mentioned in Somdet Pun’s and Achan Tritha’s biographies. It is also mentioned in the Dhammakaya Foundation’s *Life and times of Luang Phaw Wat Paknam*:

While Candasaro was at Wat Songpinong he recalled the bundle of Mahāsatipatṭhāna Sutta scriptures [...]. He realized, in his eleventh year of monkhood, that he had reached the benchmark he had set for himself in Pali studies. He was now able to translate that bundle fluently – and in

²⁷ ก่อนแต่จะมาเรียนคันถธุระนั้นได้ตั้งหนังสือใบลานมหาสติปัฏฐานลานยาวไว้ที่วัดสองพี่น้องผู้หนึ่งว่า ถ้าไปเล่าเรียนคราวนี้ต้องแปลหนังสือผู้นี้ให้ออก จึงเป็นที่พอแก่ความต้องการ ถ้ายังแปลไม่ออกก็เป็นอันไม่หยุดในการเรียน แต่พอแปลออกก็หยุด ในพรรษาที่ ๑๑ เมื่อหยุดต่อการเรียนปริยัติแล้วก็เริ่มทำจริงจังในทางปฏิบัติ.

accordance with his original intention, would discontinue his Pali studies and undertake the task of studying meditation in earnest (Dhammakaya Foundation 1998: 37).

Newell (2008: 66–7) refers to this passage in the Dhammakaya Foundation’s biography of Luang Pho Sot and states that this account ‘suggests a modern, post-reform understanding of meditation and its relationship to texts’. She suggests that it may be a later interpolation added to defend the tradition against charges of heterodoxy at the time when the Burmese *vipassanā* movement dominated the Mahānikāya order. However, I would like to argue that having found the same account in the autobiography, it is highly unlikely that this is a later interpolation as it seems extremely improbable that any student of Luang Pho Sot would have dared to alter or add to it. Moreover, as I shall explain below, in my survey of the 63 sermons of Luang Pho Sot, I found that the earliest surviving sermon, titled ‘Phra Phutthakhun Phra Thammakhun Phra Sangkhakhun’ (Qualities of the Buddha, Dhamma and Saṅgha),²⁸ given between 1945 and 1946, which is prior to the introduction of Rise and Fall meditation from Burma to Thailand, already provides a section explaining Sammā Arahaṃ meditation in terms of the four *satipaṭṭhānas*²⁹ (63 sermons 1984: 42–43). As I shall discuss further below, the ‘Rise and Fall’ or Yup No Phong No meditation system, developed by Mahasi Sayadaw (1904–82), is the most widely practised Burmese *vipassanā*

²⁸ พระพุทธคุณ พระธรรมคุณ พระสังฆคุณ.

²⁹ Translated as ‘Four Foundations of Mindfulness’ and ‘Four Frames of Reference’, it refers to the practice of having mindfulness established on four objects: body (*kāyānupassanā satipaṭṭhāna*), feelings (*vedanānupassanā satipaṭṭhāna*), mind (*cittānupassanā satipaṭṭhāna*) and dhammas (*dharmānupassanā satipaṭṭhāna*).

method in Thailand.³⁰ It is a form of ‘bare’ or ‘dry’ insight method based on an interpretation of the Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta and Visuddhimagga’s stages of insight knowledge (*vipassanā ñāṇa*), but omitting the parts that are regarded as *samatha* (calm or tranquillity) meditation. It was first introduced in Thailand in 1953 at Wat Mahathat, Bangkok.

From the available evidence, which will be discussed below, Luang Pho Sot appears to be among one of the first Thai meditation teachers of his time to incorporate the Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta and the scheme of the four *satipaṭṭhānas* as a central text and practice of his meditation system. His focus on the Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta is due to his belief that the four *satipaṭṭhānas* constitute the ‘only path’ to *nibbāna*, an understanding that is derived from one of the existing interpretations of the words *ekāyanamagga*³¹ at the time.

Luang Pho Sot studied meditation with many renowned teachers at the time. Newell (2008: 67), following Amphai’s MA thesis (2004: 45), mentions eight centres and meditation masters: Phra Mongkon Thipmuni (Mui) (Wat Chakrawat, Bangkok), Phra Achan Dee (Wat Pratoosarn, Suphanburi), Luang Pho Nong Indasuvanṇo (Wat Amphawan, Suphanburi), Luang Pho Niam Dhammajoti (Wat Noi, Suphanburi), Phra

³⁰ The ‘Rise and Fall’ meditation system is one of the most popular Burmese *vipassanā* methods. It was developed by Mahasi Sayadaw (1904–82). It is a form of ‘bare’ or ‘dry’ insight method based on an interpretation of the Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta and Visuddhimagga’s stages of insight knowledge (*vipassanā ñāṇa*), but omitting the parts that are regarded as *samatha* (calm or tranquillity) meditation.

³¹ *Ekāyanamagga* is Pāli expression, which describes the practice of the Four Foundations of Mindfulness (*satipaṭṭhānas*) in the Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta. It has been variously translated as ‘one way’, ‘sole way’, ‘only way’, ‘direct path’, ‘unified path’ etc.

Sangwaranuwong (Achan Aium) (Wat Ratchasittharam, Thonburi), Phra Khru Yanwirat (Po) (Wat Pho, Bangkok), Achan Sing (Wat Lakorntham, Bangkok) and Achan Pluum (Wat Khaoyai, Kanchanaburi).

However, out of all the eight meditation centres and teachers, the autobiography only lists five in chronological order, namely: 1) Luang Pho Nong, Wat Amphawan; 2) Luang Pho Niam, Wat Noi; 3) Achan Aium, Wat Ratchasittharam; 4) Phra Khru Yanwirat (Po), Wat Pho; and 5) Achan Sing, Wat Lakorntham (*63 sermons* 1984: (3)). Two other teachers, namely Phra Mongkon Thipmuni (Mui), Wat Chakrawat and Achan Pluum, Wat Khaoyai, are mentioned in Somdet Pun's biography (*63 sermons* 1984: (10)), whereas the last teacher, who is also Luang Pho Sot's preceptor, Achan Dee, Wat Pratoosarn, is referred to in Achan Tritha's biography (1984: 56). The reason why Luang Pho Sot only mentions five in the autobiography instead of eight may be because he considers these five to be his main meditation teachers. As I shall show below, three of these five, namely Luang Pho Nong, Wat Amphawan, Luang Pho Niam, Wat Noi and Achan Aium, Wat Ratchasittharam, were certainly influential in his development of *Sammā Arahaṃ* meditation.

The autobiography and Somdet Pun's biography also shed light on the extent of Luang Pho Sot's Pāli training prior to developing *Sammā Arahaṃ* meditation. English-language academic sources differ in their opinions on this issue. Some tend to assume that as a meditation master, Luang Pho Sot's understanding of Pāli did not extend beyond the basic levels. Others believe that he had a much more in-depth understanding. For example, Newell (2008: 66), in discussing Luang Pho Sot's education, cites Phra Terence Magness's

biography, which suggests that Luang Pho Sot did not finish his course, failed his Pāli examination and later recalled that if he had passed it, it would have been detrimental to his meditation practice. She further suggests that, like Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, Luang Pho Sot may have deliberately failed his examination as a reaction to the monastic reforms (Newell 2008: 66). Amphai (2004: 44), however, quotes from her interview with Achan Sermchai, who claims that Luang Pho Sot was very proficient in Pāli, equivalent to today's highest *Parian* grade (level 9).³²

In order to assess these statements, I again refer to the autobiography and Somdet Pun's biography. The autobiography states that at Wat Pho, Luang Pho Sot studied the grammatical text *Mūlakaccāyana* three times, before studying the texts 'Dhammapada', 'Dīpanī' and 'Sārasaṅgaha' until he was able to translate 'quite well' (*63 sermons* 1984: (3)).³³ 'Dīpanī' here is most likely to refer to the *Maṅgalatthadīpanī*, as Somdet Pun mentions this as a text Luang Pho Sot studied, and *Dhammapada* here is most likely Buddhaghosa's *Dhammapada* commentary as it has been a part of the standard curricula for Pāli examinations prior to and after the monastic educational reform of 1902. Somdet Pun also mentions the *Visuddhimagga* as another text Luang Pho Sot studied in preparation for meditation practice (*63 sermons* 1984: (10)). He further states that at one point Luang Pho Sot was studying at three temples: Wat Arun, Wat Mahathat and Wat Pho. At Wat Pho, Luang Pho Sot turned his dwelling (*kuti*) into a classroom and invited Phra Mahā Pi Vasuttama, who had passed the fifth grade (*parian*), to teach him along with 10 other

³² In Thailand, the study of Pāli consists of seven grades, starting with grade 3 and ending with grade 9. Those who pass the examinations are called 'Parian'.

³³ เรียนมูลกัจจายน์ ถึงสามจบ แล้วเรียนธรรมบท ทีปนีและสารสังคหะ แต่พอเป็นว่าแปลออกพอสมควรแล้ว ก็หยุดการเรียนคันถธุระ.

monks and novices (*63 sermons* 1984: (9)). Luang Pho Sot had already studied the Dhammapada commentary but opted to study it again with Phra Mahā Pi in order to refresh his memory (*63 sermons* 1984: (8–9)). By the end of the course, according to Somdet Pun, Luang Pho Sot was proficient enough to teach (*63 sermons* 1984: (8–9)).³⁴ Later, when the reform of the monastic education was being implemented, Luang Pho Sot’s classroom had to shut itself down and he and other members had to adopt Prince-Patriarch Wachirayan’s curricula (*63 sermons* 1984: (9–10)). Neither the autobiography nor Somdet Pun’s nor Achan Tritha’s biographies mention anything about Luang Pho Sot failing his Pāli exam. However, Somdet Pun’s biography explicitly states that Luang Pho Sot did not take the new written exams at Sanam Luang³⁵ (*63 sermons* 1984: (9)).

The Mūlakaccāyana is a Thai compilation of Kaccāyana’s grammar based on the original suttas, commentaries and examples from various other Pāli scriptures to illustrate grammatical rules (Skilling and Pakdeekham 2002: 281–2). Prior to the educational reform, Mūlakaccāyana was widely used in Thailand as a grammatical textbook in preparation for Pāli examinations. Learning the Mūlakaccāyana is a time-consuming task as one must memorize all of the 677 Pāli formulae and their translations before one can commence learning the explanations of the grammatical rules (Sapya 1977: 14). In my interview with Rungarun Chantharasongkhram (2017), a Pāli lecturer at Chulalongkorn University Dhamma Centre who studied this text in detail, he informed me that as the Mūlakaccāyana

³⁴ The Dhammakaya Foundation biography’s claim that at Wat Pho, Luang Pho Sot was actually teaching Pāli up to the fifth grade is most likely a mistranslation of these passages in Somdet Pun’s and/or Achan Tritha’s biographies (Dhammakaya Foundation 1998: 35).

³⁵ The open field and public square in front of the Grand Palace, Bangkok.

is quite a difficult text to start with, the prerequisite to study it is normally to learn an easier grammatical text such as the *Padarūpasiddhi* first.³⁶ According to him, to learn the *Mūlakaccāyana* would take about two to four years depending on one's background in Pāli. Once one mastered the text, one would be proficient enough to read the *Tipiṭaka*, the commentaries, and other Pāli grammatical texts with ease. Perhaps due to its difficulty, Luang Pho Sot opted to study the *Mūlakaccāyana* three times before embarking on other texts. The *Maṅgalatthadīpanī* is a detailed commentary on the *Maṅgala Sutta* composed by Sirimaṅgala in Chiang Mai in 1524 (Skilling and Pakdeekham 2002: 125–6). *Sārasaṅgaha*, also known as *Sāratthasaṅgaha*, is a thirteenth/fourteenth century compendium of Buddhist doctrine taken from various canonical and non-canonical sources arranged according to theme (Skilling and Pakdeekham 2002: 177).

Thus it seems possible that having studied Pāli for 11 years and learned all of these texts, in particular the *Mūlakaccāyana* three times, Luang Pho Sot had much more than a basic understanding of Pāli. As I shall argue below, the evidence of his initial interests in the *Mahāsatipatṭhāna Sutta* and the *Visuddhimagga* in these early biographies is not a later interpolation. Luang Pho Sot was able to read these texts in Pāli from the very beginning. In developing *Sammā Arahaṃ* meditation, far from relying exclusively on the meditation teachings of some of his renowned teachers, the Pāli suttas and the *Visuddhimagga* were also of significant influence on his development of the meditation system.

³⁶ The *Padarūpasiddhi* is another grammatical text of the *Kaccāyana* family, to which the *Mūlakaccāyana* also belongs. It was composed by Buddhappiya in Sri Lanka in the 13th century.

Once he was satisfied with his Pāli and meditation training, Luang Pho Sot moved to Wat Botbon Bangkhuwiang, a temple in Nonthaburi. On the full-moon night of the 10th month, in his 15th year of monkhood (1916), the autobiography states that Luang Pho Sot made a vow not to get up from his seat until he had seen the Buddha's Dhamma, echoing the resolve of the Buddha beneath the bodhi tree (*63 sermons* 1984: (4)). He 'begged' the Buddha to bestow on him the 'smallest' and 'simplest' Dhamma of his enlightenment, but only if by doing so, it would not cause harm, but would benefit the Buddha's religion (*63 sermons* 1984: (4)).³⁷ On this night, according to the autobiography, Luang Pho Sot finally saw the 'real' 'chart/map' of the Buddha (*63 sermons* 1984: (4)).³⁸ This 'chart', which is obtained not by thinking and pondering, but by continuously stopping his mind still at the centre of the body, later became known as *Sammā Arahaṃ* or the *Dhammakāya* meditation system (*63 sermons* 1984: (4)). As I shall explain in detail in the next section, the centre of the body here refers to the seventh position, two finger widths above the navel, and it is where the meditator gains the vision of the *dhamma* sphere. The autobiography ends with Luang Pho Sot's move to Wat Bangpla, Nakhon Pathom, determined to pass on the teachings he discovered.

³⁷ จึงได้แสดงความอ่อนน้อมแด่พระพุทธเจ้าว่า ขอพระองค์ได้ทรงพระกรุณาโปรดข้าพระพุทธเจ้า ทรงประทานธรรมที่พระองค์ได้ทรงตรัสรู้อย่างน้อยที่สุด แลง่ายที่สุดที่พระองค์ได้ทรงรู้แล้วแต่ข้าพระพุทธเจ้า ถ้าข้าพระพุทธเจ้ารู้ธรรมของพระองค์แล้ว เป็นโทษแก่ศาสนาของพระองค์แล้ว ขอพระองค์อย่าทรงพระราชทานเลย ถ้าเป็นคุณแก่ศาสนาของพระองค์แล้ว ขอพระองค์ได้ทรงพระกรุณาโปรด พระราชทานแต่ข้าพระองค์.

³⁸ เห็นผั่งของจริงของพระพุทธเจ้า.



Figure 2.1: *Vihāra* at Wat Botbon Bangkhuwiang, Nonthaburi, where Luang Pho Sot first developed Sammā Arahaṃ meditation (photograph by the author).

The rest of the account is a summary of Somdet Pun's biography. In the same year, Luang Pho Sot was appointed abbot of Wat Paknam by the Thai Saṅgha Supreme Council and requested to restore the half-abandoned monastery. Luang Pho Sot renovated and developed the monastery as a centre of meditation and scriptural studies. In running Wat Paknam, he seemed to have put equal emphasis on both meditation practice and Pāli

education. Somdet Pun explains that prior to the construction of the Pariyatti School,³⁹ Wat Paknam's monks and novices had to travel to various temples in Thonburi and Bangkok to study, but after the construction of the three-storey building in 1950, which could accommodate over 1,000 people, Wat Paknam became the centre for Pāli and Dhamma studies and examinations of Phasicharoen district, Thonburi (*63 sermons* 1984: (13)).

In 1957, Luang Pho Sot was given the monastic title of Phra Mongkhon Thepmuni.⁴⁰ As the number of monks and novices grew, Luang Pho Sot assumed responsibility in providing food for them. In 1959, he built a dining hall and a kitchen large enough to accommodate 600 monks and novices. At the time, this arrangement was quite unique in Thai Buddhism as most monks had to go on alms rounds to beg for food every morning. Achan Tritha (1984: 105) explains that while he was studying at Wat Pho, Luang Pho Sot knew the hardship of not getting enough food on alms rounds and how it affected his studies and meditation progress. In having the dining hall built at Wat Paknam, Luang Pho Sot wanted the monks and novices to spend more time studying and practising meditation without having to worry about begging for food every morning (Tritha 1984: 105).⁴¹

³⁹ A school that teaches and prepares monks and novices for Pāli and Naktham (Dhamma Studies) examinations. The study of Buddhist teachings in Thailand consists of three grades. Those who pass the examinations are called 'Naktham'.

⁴⁰ Upon ordination, a Thai monk is given a Pāli name or *chaya*, which he uses along with his given name, for example Sot (given name) Candasarō (*chaya*). Later, he may be given monastic titles based on accomplishment and recognition of service. This title is then used in front of his given name and *chaya*, for example Phra Mongkhon Thepmuni (monastic title), Sot Candasarō. Monks who have passed the third-grade Pāli examination have the honorific 'Mahā' in front of their names. Monks with the title 'Phra Thep' belong to the 'Thep' (Deva) class, which is one of the four special classes – one class below 'Phra Tham' (Dhamma) and one class above 'Phra Rat' (Rāja).

⁴¹ Achan Tritha's biography of Luang Pho Sot provides the most detailed account of this undertaking (Tritha 1984: 105–116). See also summaries in Bowers (1996: 49) and Mackenzie (2007: 35–6).

Luang Pho Sot also carried out many kinds of social work, including setting up a community school for poor children and accommodating the elderly. He was widely known for his healing skills and for the amulets that he offered to those who donated to the construction of the Pariyatti School or came to practise meditation at Wat Paknam. The amulets are said to derive their power from the cultivation of merits gained from meditation for the whole three months of rain retreat. Luang Pho Sot died at Wat Paknam in 1959 at the age of 75, having been a monk for 53 years.

2.2 An analysis of Sammā Arahaṃ meditation as taught by Luang Pho Sot

The sources for this summary shall be taken from the direct teachings of Luang Pho Sot in the *63 sermons* collection, which not only contains these sermons, but also two important meditation handbooks compiled by students of Luang Pho Sot, namely, *The basic principles of samatha-vipassanā meditation*⁴² compiled by Phra Phawana Koson Thera (Thira Dhammadharo) in 1961 and the *Abbot's handbook*⁴³ compiled in 1948 by Nawarat Hiranrak, Somsong Sutsakhon and Chaluai Sombatsuk. The former consists of the basic level of Sammā Arahaṃ meditation and the latter, the higher levels summarized and published by the order of the Supreme Patriarch Somdet Phra Wachirayanawong, the abbot of Wat Bowonniwet, who took an interest in Sammā Arahaṃ meditation. This section also relies on the book *A compilation of Dhamma sermons of Phra Mongkhon Thepmuni (Sot*

⁴² หลักการเจริญภาวนา สมถวิปัสสนากรรมฐานเบื้องต้น.

⁴³ คู่มือสมาธิ.

Candasaro).⁴⁴ This book, published in 2012, not only includes the 63 sermons from the older collection, but also four more previously unknown sermons. The two books provide the most complete collection of all of Luang Pho Sot's teachings.⁴⁵

As I mentioned above, all Western academic works that attempt to analyse Sammā Arahaṃ meditation rely on secondary sources in English: Mackenzie and Bowers on Achan Sermchai's *The heart of Dhammakaya meditation* (Sermchai 1991), and Newell on Achan Sermchai's book and Dhammakaya Temple's websites. These summaries, although accurate, do not present Sammā Arahaṃ meditation from Luang Pho Sot's own point of view: for example, the various canonical and non-canonical sources that he presents, and the emphasis on *satipaṭṭhāna* practice in his earliest sermons. Moreover, as I shall later attempt to analyse the development of Sammā Arahaṃ meditation from Luang Pho Sot to Achan Sermchai, this analysis will be based solely on Luang Pho Sot's teachings, and not on any secondary sources, with the only exception being the diagram of the seven bases in English, which is taken from Achan Sermchai's book (Sermchai 1991: 60). The summary covers the basic level, the 18-body meditation and the contemplation of *dhammakāya*.

⁴⁴ รวมพระธรรมเทศนา พระมงคลเทพมุนี (สด จนฺทสโร). The 943-page book is compiled and edited by a group of 'students of Luang Pho Wat Paknam' headed by Phra Wichai Vijayo. Its advisor board includes the abbot of Wat Paknam, Somdet Ratchmangkhlachan (Chuang Varapuñño), Phra Theppariyatwong, Phra Khru Phawanuwat (Chuwit Aggavijjo), Phra Mahamongkhon (Maṅgalo) and Achan Tritha Niamkham. It was published on the occasion of the completion of the Maharatchamongkhon Cetiya at Wat Paknam in 2012. Apart from the 67 sermons, the book also contains the autobiography and four short teachings by Luang Pho Sot, including his final teaching. However, the *Abbot's handbook* is not included within this book. For the rest of the dissertation, I shall call this book *Compilation of Dhamma sermons*.

⁴⁵ The only known works by Luang Pho Sot not included in these two books are วิชามรรคผลพิสดาร and วิชามรรคผลพิสดาร ๒ (*Complete maggaphala training* and *Complete maggaphala training 2*) (Mongkhon Thepmuni 1973 and 1975). These two volumes, like the *Abbot's handbook*, aim to provide a summary of higher stages of Sammā Arahaṃ meditation, but are not meant for the general public, and are only distributed among those who have completed the 18-body stage.

Sammā Arahaṃ meditation as developed by Luang Pho Sot consists of two preliminary techniques: 1) *parikamma nimitta* (preparatory/preliminary sign), the visualization of a crystal sphere; and 2) *parikamma bhāvanā* (preparatory/preliminary stage of meditation), the recitation of the Pāli words ‘*sammā arahaṃ*’. Both of these Pāli terms appear throughout the compilations of Luang Pho Sot’s teachings (for example, *Compilation of Dhamma sermons* 2012: 925). When teaching this method, Luang Pho Sot used a crystal ball as an object of visualization and a diagram of the path to the centre of the body as a teaching aid.



Figure 2.2: Photograph of Luang Pho Sot teaching meditation at Wat Paknam
(photograph taken by the author).

The meditator visualizes a clear crystal sphere, the size of an eyeball, entering the nostril – the left nostril for women and the right for men (first base) – while repeating the mantra ‘*sammā araham*’ three times. Then very slowly the crystal sphere is visualized as moving to the eye socket (second base) – the left eye for women and the right for men – and again ‘*sammā araham*’ is repeated three times. Then the meditator moves the crystal sphere to the centre of the head (third base), then to the back of the palate (fourth base), the throat aperture (fifth base), the navel (sixth base) and finally two finger widths above the navel (seventh base). The words ‘*sammā araham*’ are repeated three times when the sphere is moved to each base. When the crystal sphere is at the seventh position, the meditator must draw his/her mind to rest at the centre of the sphere. The more experienced meditator can start by visualizing the sphere directly at the seventh base. As shown below, the bodily bases and the visualization of the sphere *nimitta* (mental image) are found in many other traditional Theravāda meditation texts throughout Southeast Asia and Sri Lanka and are the common characteristics of the so-called ‘*borān kammaṭṭhāna*’ tradition. ‘*Sammā araham*’, described by Luang Pho Sot as ‘the recollection of the Buddha’, as I shall discuss below, is a popular mantra and is found in chanting texts and other meditation traditions and still drawn on *yantras* in Thailand today (*Compilation of Dhamma sermons* 2012: 879).

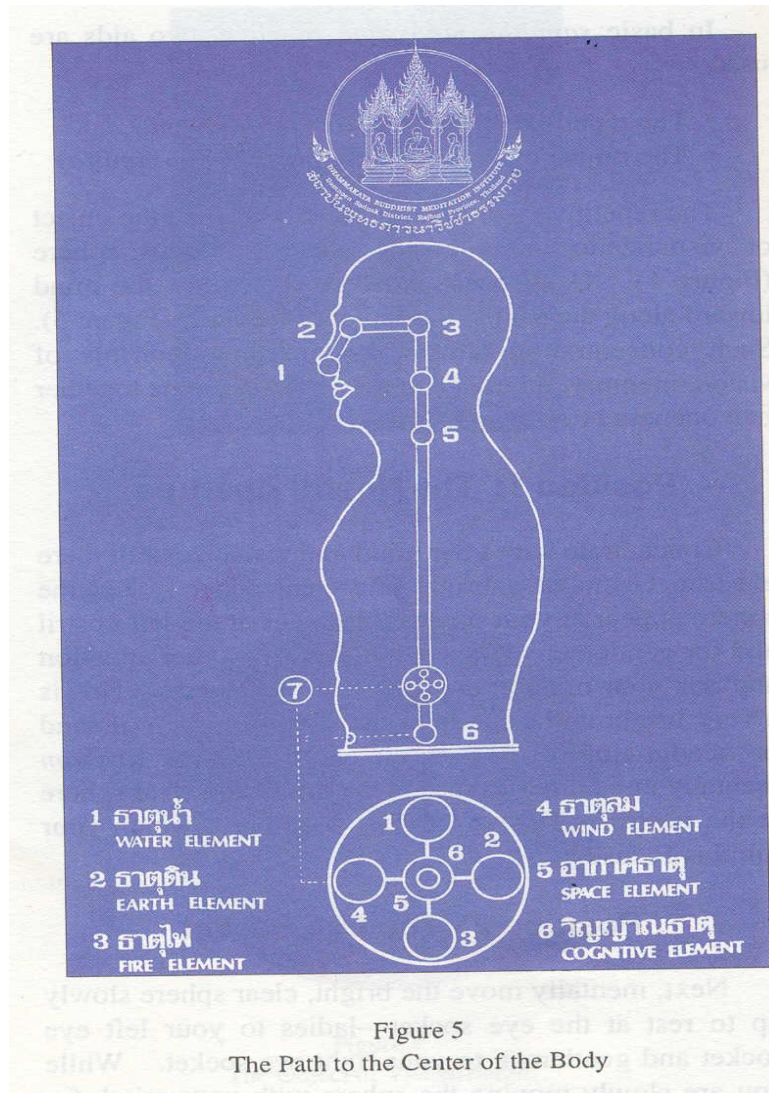


Figure 2.3: Illustration of the seven bodily bases and the six elements in Sammā Arahaṃ meditation (Sermchai 1991: 60).

First base: nostril aperture

Second base: eye socket

Third base: centre of the head

Fourth base: palate terminus

Fifth base: throat aperture

Sixth base: navel

Seventh base: two finger widths above the navel

The next step is to keep the mind still at the centre of the sphere at the seventh base. The mind consists of sensing (*vedanā*), remembering (*saññā*), thinking (*sankhāra*) and knowing (*viññāṇa*) joined together. This is because, according to Luang Pho Sot, the seventh base is where the mind naturally resides within our bodies and exists as a clear bright sphere. When the mind is completely still at the centre of the body, a bright sphere the size of the sun or the moon will appear at the centre of the meditator's body. Then, the meditator stops visualizing and reciting the Pāli words. It is said that the meditator will see his/her mind or the *dhamma* or *dhammānupassanā satipaṭṭhāna*⁴⁶ sphere. The term *dhammānupassanā satipaṭṭhāna* (sphere) appears throughout Luang Pho Sot's teachings and is one of the most often used terms along with the terms *sammā araham* and *dhammakāya*. It is called the *dhamma* sphere because at this stage the meditator's mind reaches the *dhamma* of a human being, i.e. endowed with the qualities that lead one to be reborn as a human being, namely purity of body, speech and mind. For the subsequent bodies, when the *dhamma* sphere is attained, the equivalent body is also manifested simultaneously.

The *dhamma* sphere is the mind of a particular body. It is also called the *dhammānupassanā satipaṭṭhāna* sphere because by attaining it and being mindful of it, the meditator has

⁴⁶ Mindfulness firmly established on *dhammas* (variously translated as states, phenomena, nature of things or mind objects). This term is taken from Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta (D II 209).

achieved calmness of bodily, verbal and mental activities. In the sermon titled ‘Ratanattayagamanapaṇāmakāthā’ given in 1945 (63 sermons 1984: 45–52; *Compilation of Dhamma sermons* 2012: 65–73), one of Luang Pho Sot’s earliest surviving sermons, he explains being mindful of the *dhammānupassanā satipaṭṭhāna* sphere and attaining the inner sphere in terms of *satipaṭṭhānas* as follows:

Calming bodily activities [*kāyasāṅkhāra*] means the breathing stops, calming verbal activities [*vacīsāṅkhāra*] means the reflecting stops, and calming mental activities [*cittasāṅkhāra*] means the mind stops still at the centre of the *dhamma* sphere of the human body. This is called *santi* [peace]. The breath ceasing at the same place is called *ānāpāna*, which means the breath stopping still or having no breath. When the three activities [*sāṅkhāra*] stop there, it is called *kāyānupassanā satipaṭṭhāna*. When the activities are calmed, there is the arising of joy. This is called *vedanānupassanā satipaṭṭhāna*. The mind thinking that it has joy is called *cittānupassanā satipaṭṭhāna*. When the three *satipaṭṭhānas* are together right there, a luminous sphere will appear, the size of an egg yolk, the moon or the sun, pure and clear like a mirror. This is called *dhammānupassanā satipaṭṭhāna*. Some call this sphere ‘Phra Dhamma the crystal sphere’ [พระธรรมดวงแก้ว]. (*Compilation of Dhamma sermons* 2012: 69)⁴⁷

⁴⁷ กายสังขารสงบ คือลมหายใจหยุด วจิตสังขารสงบ คือความตรึงตรองหยุด
จิตสังขารสงบคือใจหยุดอยู่ที่กลางของดวงธรรมที่ทำให้เป็นกายมนุษย์ ชื่อว่าสันติ ลมหยุดไปในที่เดียวกันชื่อว่า อานาปาน
ซึ่งแปลว่าลมหยุดนิ่งหรือไม่มี เมื่อสังขารทั้ง ๓ หยุดถูกส่วนเข้าแล้ว เรียกว่ากายานุปัสสนาสติปัฏฐานด้วยส่วนนี้
เมื่อสังขารสงบมีความสุขเกิดขึ้นเรียกว่า เวทนानุปัสสนาสติปัฏฐาน จิตคิดว่าเป็นสุขเรียกว่า จิตตานุปัสสนาสติปัฏฐาน
ในเมื่อสติปัฏฐานทั้ง ๓ ถูกส่วนพร้อมกันเข้า เกิดเป็นดวงใสขึ้น เท้าฟองไข่แดงหรือเท้าดวงจันทร์ดวงอาทิตย์
ใสบริสุทธิ์สนิทเหมือนกระจกส่องเงาหน้านั่นแหละธัมมานุปัสสนาสติปัฏฐาน ดวงนี้บางท่านเรียกว่า พระธรรมดวงแก้ว.

In this sermon, Luang Pho Sot is describing the calming of the bodily, verbal and mental activities following the Ānāpānasati Sutta (M III 78), specifically the part where the *sutta* connects the practice of mindfulness of breath with the four *satipaṭṭhānas*.⁴⁸ The word *santi* (peace), etymologically related to the word *samatha*, may be referring to the attainment of *jhāna*, and the word *ānāpāna* here may be referring to the breath (*kāyasaṅkhāra*) ceasing at the attainment of the fourth *jhāna*.⁴⁹

The *dharmānupassanā satipaṭṭhāna* sphere is termed the sphere of the ‘first path’ (*paṭhamamagga*) and the ‘only path’ (*ekāyanamagga*) by Luang Pho Sot. He explains that to reach the path (*magga*), fruit (*phala*) and *nibbāna*, there is only one way, which means stopping still at the centre of the *dharmā* sphere (*Compilation of Dhamma sermons* 2012: 910).

When one enters the centre of the sphere, one aspect of it is called ‘*paṭhamamagga*’. Another aspect of the sphere is called ‘*ekāyanamagga*’, meaning ‘the only path’ as there is only ‘one way’, without second, without a second way. (*Compilation of Dhamma sermons* 2012: 910)⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Mindfulness established on the body (*kāyānupassanā satipaṭṭhāna*), feelings (*vedanānupassanā satipaṭṭhāna*), the mind (*cittānupassanā satipaṭṭhāna*) and *dharmas* (*dharmānupassanā satipaṭṭhāna*).

⁴⁹ Various places in the *suttas* refer to the stage when *kāyasaṅkhāra* are tranquillized in the fourth *jhāna* (D III 270, 291; A V 31), and in Ps II 365 it is explicitly stated that the breath ceases: *tato kāyasaṅkhāro ti tato param kāyasaṅkhāro catutthajjhāne nirujjhati*. I thank Rupert Gethin for helping me locate these references.

⁵⁰ เมื่อเข้ากลางดวงศูนย์กลางนั้นได้แล้ว เรียกว่า ปฐมมรรค หนึ่ง ดวงนั้นแหละเรียกว่า เอกายนมรรค แปลว่า หนทางเอก ไม่มีโท สองไม่มี.

This sphere is called ‘*dhammānupassanā satipaṭṭhāna*’ and is the way of all Buddhas and *arahants* in the whole world and *dhammas*. The Buddhas and *arahants*, when going to *nibbāna*, must take this path that is without any separated paths, all going in the same way. (*Compilation of Dhamma sermons* 2012: 910)⁵¹

Inside the mind there are five points, which consist of five basic elements:

1. Water element: front
2. Earth element: right
3. Wind element: left
4. Fire element: back
5. Space element: centre (see, for example, *Compilation of Dhamma sermons* 2012: 906, 926 and 930)

Luang Pho Sot explains that the water element controls the fluidity of the body. The earth element controls the solidity, the wind element the internal movement of gases, the fire element the body temperature and the space element the spaces in the body. Inside the space element lies the consciousness element (*viññāṇadhātu*), which controls the consciousness. When the *dhamma* sphere is attained, the process in *Sammā Araham* meditation is to repeatedly stop the mind completely still at the centre of the sphere at the

⁵¹ ดวงนั้นแหละเรียกว่า อัมมานุปัสสนาสติปัฏฐาน เป็นทางไปของพระพุทธเจ้าพระอรหันต์ทั้งหมดในสากลโลกในสากลธรรม พระพุทธเจ้าพระอรหันต์จะเข้าไปสู่นิพพาน ต้องไปทางนี้ทางเดียว ไม่มีทางแตกแยกจากกัน ไปแนวเดียวทางเดียวกันหมด.

centre of the body. From this point on, there exist internal spheres that lead to internal bodies within the human mind. The first inner body (the refined human body) resides within the *dhamma* sphere (the mind) at the centre of the human body. The second inner body (the crude *deva* body) resides within the *dhamma* sphere at the centre of the refined human body, and so on. To reach all of the inner bodies, the meditator must place his/her mind completely still at the centre of the body (the seventh bodily base) and each inner sphere and body will be seen expanding from that centre.

The meditator places his/her mind very still at the centre of the *dhamma* sphere, and another sphere will appear from inside the *dhamma* sphere. This is called the *sīla* or the morality sphere. The meditator stops still at the centre of the *sīla* sphere, and another sphere will appear from inside the *sīla* sphere, the *samādhi* or the concentration sphere. Inside the *samādhi* sphere is the *paññā* sphere or the wisdom sphere. Inside the *paññā* sphere is the *vimutti* or the sphere of liberation. Inside the *vimutti* sphere is the *vimuttiñāṇadassana* or sphere of knowledge and vision of liberation. Luang Pho Sot explains that going through each sphere and each body is equivalent to practising the Eightfold Noble Path as more defilements are abandoned at the same time as morality, concentration and wisdom are developed.

It should be noted that although Luang Pho Sot does not state the source of these five terms, *sīla*, *samādhi*, *paññā*, *vimutti* and *vimuttiñāṇadassana* appear as a list at various places in the *nikāyas* to denote the qualities of the Buddha and the noble ones. For example, in Issatha Sutta (S I 98) and Vaccha Sutta (A I 160), the Buddha explains that gifts should be

given to virtuous persons who have abandoned the five hindrances and are endowed with the five factors, namely *sīla*, *samādhi*, *paññā*, *vimutti* and *vimuttiñāṇadassana*. In the Gārava Sutta (S I 138), the Buddha, shortly after his enlightenment, contemplated that as he had already perfected the five aggregates of *sīla*, *samādhi*, *paññā*, *vimutti* and *vimuttiñāṇadassana*, there was no one he could depend on and honour as his teacher. He therefore decided to honour only the Dhamma as his teacher. In the Itivuttaka (Iti 107), those who are endowed with these five qualities are described as ‘teachers’, ‘leaders’, ‘abandoners of harms’, ‘noble ones’, ‘makers of light’, ‘endowed with eyes that see’ etc. (Thanissaro 2001).

Placing the mind still at the centre of the *vimuttiñāṇadassana* sphere, a body will appear from inside the sphere. This is the refined human body. It is the body we use in our dreams. At the centre of the refined human body there is also a *dhamma* sphere, i.e. the mind of the refined human body. Inside the *dhamma* sphere of the refined human body, there is the *sīla* sphere. Inside the *sīla* sphere, there is the *samādhi*, *paññā*, *vimutti* and *vimuttiñāṇadassana* spheres as in the crude human body. The meditator has to go through these six spheres before reaching the next body.

Having reached the *vimuttiñāṇadassana* sphere, the meditator stops still at the centre of the sphere and the crude celestial or *deva* body appears. At this stage the *dhamma* or the mind of the celestial being is reached, and therefore the body of the celestial being is manifested simultaneously. The *deva* body is described as sitting on a seat, and decorated with a crown, a necklace and a neck chain. Then the meditator goes through the six spheres to reach the

refined *deva* body and six spheres to reach the crude *brahmā* body. At this stage the mind or *dhamma* of the *brahmā* is reached and the body of the *brahmā* is manifested. Then the meditator goes through the six spheres to reach the refined *brahmā* body, and six spheres to reach the crude formless *brahmā* body. At this stage the mind or *dhamma* of the formless *brahmā* is reached and the body of the formless *brahmā* is manifested. Then the meditator goes through the six spheres to reach the refined formless *brahmā* body and so on.

Luang Pho Sot explains that the *dhamma sphere* of the human body appears when one has purity of body, speech and mind; the *dhamma sphere* of the *deva* body, when one has *sacca* (truthfulness), *cāga* (generosity) and *paññā* (wisdom); the *dhamma sphere* of the *brahmā* body when one has first, second, third and fourth *jhānas*; and the *dhamma sphere* of the formless *brahmā* body when one has the four formless *jhānas* (*Compilation of Dhamma sermons* 2012: 290). Each *dhamma sphere* is thus purer and more refined than the previous one and its qualities correspond to the qualities of the being of the respective cosmological realm.

Inside the *vimuttiñāṇadassana* sphere of the refined formless *brahmā* body there is the *dhamma sphere* of the first unconditioned body or the *dhamma* body (*dhammakāya*). It appears like a Buddha statue with a lotus bud upon the head and clear as a mirror (*Compilation of Dhamma sermons* 2012: 912). This is *dhammakāya gotrabhū*. At the centre of the *vimuttiñāṇadassana* sphere, there appears the refined *dhammakāya gotrabhū*. As the meditator places his/her mind still at the spheres at the centre of the body, more and more refined inner *dhamma* bodies appear as the mind becomes even purer and more

refined. From the refined *dhammakāya gotrabhū*, the meditator attains *dhammakāya sotāpanna* (stream enterer), refined *dhammakāya sotāpanna*, *dhammakāya sakadāgāmī* (once returner), refined *dhammakāya sakadāgāmī*, *dhammakāya anāgāmī* (non-returner), refined *dhammakāya anāgāmī*, *dhammakāya arahatta* and finally refined *dhammakāya arahatta*. All *dhammakāyas* appear the same, like a Buddha statue.

It should be noted that different *dhammakāyas*, namely *sotāpanna*, *sakadāgāmī*, *anāgāmī* and *arahatta*, refer to the different stages of the noble person (*ariyapuggala*). An *ariyapuggala* is someone who has attained one of eight stages of the paths (*magga*) and fruits (*phala*), which culminate in the attainment of arahatship. The eight stages are: the path and fruit of the stream enterer (*sotāpanna*), the path and fruit of the once returner (*sakadāgāmī*), the path and fruit of the non-returner (*anāgāmī*) and the path and fruit of the *arahant*.⁵² In Sammā Arahaṃ meditation, the eight levels of *dhammakāyas* from *dhammakāya sotāpanna* to the refined *dhammakāya arahatta* correspond to the attainment of these eight stages. The word *gotrabhū*, however, does not occur frequently in the *nikāyas*. It is understood by the Theravāda commentarial tradition to mean ‘the matured one’ or ‘one who has entered the lineage of the noble ones’ and refers to the person who is ‘endowed with those things, immediately upon which follows the entrance into the noble

⁵² The stream enterer has abandoned the first three fetters (*saṃyojana*), namely *sakkāyadiṭṭhi* (false view of the individual), *vicikicchā* (doubt) and *śīlabbataparāmāsa* (adherence to rules and rituals), is not subject to rebirth in the lower realm and is destined to attain *nibbāna* within seven rebirths. The once returner has, in addition to the first three fetters, abandoned *kāmarāga* (sensual pleasures) and *paṭigha* (repulsion) in their grosser forms. They will return to the realm of the senses one more time before attaining *nibbāna*. The non-returner has abandoned all of the five fetters completely. They will be reborn in a higher world, one of the Pure Abodes (*suddhāvāsa*), and attaining *nibbāna* there. The *arahant* has, in addition to the five fetters, abandoned the remaining five fetters, namely *rūparāga* (attachment to realms of form), *arūparāga* (attachment to formless realms), *māna* (conceit), *uddhacca* (restlessness) and *avijjā* (ignorance). See, for example, A I 231–2 and A V 17.

path’ (Nyanatiloka 2004: 66). In a few *suttas*, such as Āhuneyya Sutta (A IV 373) and Saññā Sutta (A IV 387), *gotrabhū* is listed as the ninth noble individual. The commentaries interpret this term as ‘a single mind moment that makes the transition from the peak of insight to the world-transcending path’ (Bodhi 2012: 55).⁵³ This stage, in *Sammā Arahaṃ* meditation, is divided into two levels, namely *dhammakāya gotrabhū* and refined *dhammakāya gotrabhū*, in which, according to Luang Pho Sot, the practitioner’s mind abandons *kāmarāgānusaya* (latent sensual pleasures), *paṭighānusaya* (latent repulsion) and *avijjānusaya* (latent ignorance) (*Compilation of Dhamma sermons* 2012: 263).

Luang Pho Sot explains further that in attaining *dhammakāya sotāpanna*, one abandons *sakkāyadiṭṭhi* (false view of the individual), *vicikicchā* (doubt) and *sīlabbataparāmāsa* (adherence to rules and rituals); in attaining *dhammakāya sakadāgāmī*, the coarse *kāmarāga* (sensual pleasures) and *paṭigha* (repulsion); in attaining *dhammakāya anāgāmī* (non-returner), the refined *kāmarāga* and *paṭigha*; and in attaining *dhammakāya arahatta*, *rūparāga* (attachment to realms of form), *arūparāga* (attachment to formless realms), *māna* (conceit), *uddhacca* (restlessness) and *avijjā* (ignorance) (*Compilation of Dhamma sermons* 2012: 263–4). The qualities of each *dhammakāya*, therefore, follow the qualities of the respective noble person with regard to the fetters (*saṃyojana*) that they have abandoned.

⁵³ Bhikkhu Bodhi (2012: 55), however, argues that this commentarial explanation interprets this term ‘through the lens of the later Theravādin exegetical system’ and ‘presupposes the development of technical schemes’, which are not found in the *suttas*. For further discussions regarding the term *gotrabhū*, see von Hinüber (1994: 91–100).

The different stages of *dhammakāya* are not only equivalent to the different stages of the noble person but also to the reaching of the Triple Gems (the Buddha, the Dhamma and the *saṅgha*) within:

Where are the Three Gems of Buddha, Dhamma and *saṅgha*? They are within [each of] us [...] the Buddha is at the centre of the body. The spot at the navel called the centre of the body [...] place your mind there; when the mind stops still, enter the centre of that still mind. When they say ‘heaven and hell are in the mind’, it is true, but the Buddha is also in the mind. (*Compilation of Dhamma sermons* 2012: 376)⁵⁴

Dhammakāya is clear like crystal, so it is named *buddharatana*. The Dhamma that comes from the heart of *dhammakāya* is named *dhammaratana*. *Dhammaratana* is the heart of *dhammakāya*. The *citta* sphere of *dhammakāya* is called *saṅgharatana*. This is what they say: *buddharatana*, *dhammaratana* and *saṅgharatana*, all the Three Gems are linked together like this as one. (*Compilation of Dhamma sermons* 2012: 512)⁵⁵

⁵⁴ พุทธรัตนะ ธรรมรัตนะ สังฆรัตนะ ทั้ง ๓ นี้ อยู่ที่ไหน? อยู่ในตัวของเราตัวเอง [...] พระพุทธเจ้าอยู่กลางกาย เรามีกลางมีศูนย์ ตรงสะดือนั้นเป็นศูนย์ นั้นเรียกว่ากลางกาย [...] ให้เอาใจไปหยุดนิ่งอยู่ตรงนั้น พอใจหยุดนิ่งก็เข้ากลางของใจที่หยุดนิ่งนั้นทีเดียว ที่เขว่าสวาคอยู่ในอกนรกในใจ พระก็อยู่ในใจ.

⁵⁵ ธรรมกายมีสี่ใสเหมือนแก้วจริง ๆ จึงได้ชื่อว่าพุทธรัตนะ ธรรมทั้งหลายที่กลั่นออกจากหัวใจธรรมกาย จึงได้ชื่อว่าธรรมรัตนะ ธรรมรัตนะคือหัวใจธรรมกายนั่นเอง ดวงจิตของธรรมกายนั้นได้ชื่อว่า สังฆรัตนะ นี่แหละที่ว่าพุทธรัตนะ ธรรมรัตนะ สังฆรัตนะทั้ง ๓ ประการนี้เกี่ยวเนื่องเป็นอันเดียวกัน.

For those who can attain *dhammakāya*, this is the arising of the Buddha.
(*Compilation of Dhamma sermons* 2012: 818) ⁵⁶

Dhammakāya, the fifth body, is the most important body in Buddhism. One who can cause this body to arise is named Buddha, named *anubuddha*, a Buddha that follows the Buddha. (*Compilation of Dhamma sermons* 2012: 47) ⁵⁷

In Luang Pho Sot's understanding, when the mind or the *dhamma* of the Buddha is reached, the body of the Buddha is manifested. In referring to the Buddha within, Luang Pho Sot also incorporates the noble persons into its definition. At the levels of the noble persons, even for those who aspire to become an *arahant* or has attained arahatship, the Buddha is also manifested, although it is called *anubuddha* or a Buddha who is a follower of the Buddha.

It should be noted that according to Luang Pho Sot, *dhammakāya* is neither conceived as form, material or matter (*rūpa*) nor it is conceived as a *nimitta* (mental image). It is an unconditioned, supra-mundane, supra-physical body, which at the same time is also the source of Dhamma, or the teachings of the Buddha. Hence, from the start, Luang Pho Sot combines the two different interpretations of the word *dhammakāya*, the metaphorical interpretation (body as referring to a collection of teachings) and the literal interpretation

⁵⁶ เข้าถึงธรรมกาย เป็นละก้อ นั้นแหละเป็นความบังเกิดของพระพุทธเจ้าเลยทีเดียว.

⁵⁷ ธรรมกายเป็นกายที่ ๕ นั้นเป็นกายสำคัญที่สุดในพระพุทธศาสนา ผู้ใดทำกายนี้ให้เป็นขึ้นได้ ผู้นั้นก็ถือว่าเป็นพระพุทธเจ้า ชื่อว่าอนุพุทธเจ้า เป็นพระพุทธเจ้าตามเสด็จพระพุทธเจ้า.

(body like the physical body that can be seen), and finds no contradictions between them.

As I shall discuss below, these two interpretations along with other interpretations circulated in Thailand prior to his development of Sammā Arahaṃ meditation.

To sum up, there are 18 bodies altogether:

1. Crude human body
2. Refined human body
3. Crude *deva* body
4. Refined *deva* body
5. Crude *brahmā* body
6. Refined *brahmā* body
7. Crude formless *brahmā* body
8. Refined formless *brahmā* body
9. *Dhammakāya gotrabhū*
10. Refined *dhammakāya gotrabhū*
11. *Dhammakāya sotāpanna*
12. Refined *dhammakāya sotāpanna*
13. *Dhammakāya sakadāgāmī*
14. Refined *dhammakāya sakadāgāmī*
15. *Dhammakāya anāgāmī*
16. Refined *dhammakāya anāgāmī*
17. *Dhammakāya arahatta*

18. Refined *dhammakāya arahatta*

In the teaching of Luang Pho Sot (for example, *Compilation of Dhamma sermons* 2012: 51), one can find Luang Pho Sot's citing of the references to *brahmakāya* and *dhammakāya* in the Aggañña Sutta to support his understanding of *brahmā* body and *dhammakāya*: 'Vāsetṭha and Bhāradvāja, because the words *dhammakāya*, *brahmakāya*, *dhammabhūta* and *brahmabhūta* are the names of the Tathāgata' (D III 84).

I would like to reiterate what I discussed above. According to the autobiography, prior to his development of Sammā Arahaṃ meditation, Luang Pho Sot focused his studies particularly on the Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta (D II 290), of which he kept a personal copy. He studied the Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta well enough to translate from Pāli into Thai. His focus on the Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta may be due to his view that the four *satipaṭṭhānas* constitute the 'only path' to *nibbāna*.

The Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta begins with a formula containing a series of expressions for contemplating the body, feelings, the mind and *dhamma* states using the locative; the locative here has been variously rendered into English but can be literally rendered as 'in' and is normally rendered in an equivalent way when translated into Thai. The following passage is translated from the Thai Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta edited by Phra Thamtrailokachan (Charoen Nāṇavaro) (1872–1951), the late abbot of Wat Thepsirin, Bangkok, who later became Somdet Phra Buddhaghosācāriya. This translation is a sixth

edition, published in 1919, and may resemble the translation that Luang Pho Sot was familiar with at the time of his development of *Sammā Arahaṃ* meditation:

O monks, a monk in this religion is one who constantly examines and sees the body in body; putting an effort into passionate defilements, being aware, mindful, and bringing an end to happiness and sadness with the world. You are one who constantly examines and sees feelings in feelings; putting an effort into passionate defilements, being aware, mindful, and bringing an end to happiness and sadness with the world. You are one who constantly examines and sees *citta* in *citta*; putting an effort into passionate defilements, being aware, mindful, and bringing an end to happiness and sadness with the world. You are one who constantly examines and sees *dhamma* in *dhamma*; putting an effort into passionate defilements, being aware, mindful, and bringing an end to happiness and sadness with the world (Thamtrailokachan 1919: 3–5).⁵⁸

According to Luang Pho Sot, there are bodies inside the mind of the human body. Those inner bodies also consist of feelings, *cittas* (minds) and *dhammas*. Being familiar with the *Mahāsatiṭṭhāna Sutta*, Luang Pho Sot saw that the method of the *sutta* of being mindful of the body, feelings, *citta* and *dhammas* as applicable not only to the human body alone, but as there are also inner bodies, the mindfulness must also be extended and applied to all

⁵⁸ ดูก่อนภิกษุทั้งหลาย ภิกษุในศาสนานี้ ย่อมเป็นผู้พิจารณาเห็นกายในกายเนื่อง ๆ อยู่ มีความเพียรให้กิเลสเร่าร้อน มีสัมปชัญญะ มีสติ พึงนำภิกขมาแลโหมนัสในโลกเสียให้พินาศ เธอย่อมเป็นผู้พิจารณาเห็นเวทนาในเวทนาเนื่อง ๆ อยู่ มีความเพียรให้กิเลสเร่าร้อน มีสัมปชัญญะ มีสติ พึงนำภิกขมาแลโหมนัสในโลกเสียให้พินาศ เธอย่อมเป็นผู้พิจารณาเห็นจิตในจิตเนื่อง ๆ อยู่ มีความเพียรให้กิเลสเร่าร้อน มีสัมปชัญญะ มีสติ พึงนำภิกขมาแลโหมนัสในโลกเสียให้พินาศ เธอย่อมเป็นผู้พิจารณาเห็นธรรมในธรรมเนื่อง ๆ อยู่ มีความเพียรให้กิเลสเร่าร้อน มีสัมปชัญญะ มีสติ พึงนำภิกขมาแลโหมนัสในโลกเสียให้พินาศ.

the inner bodies and also feelings, *cittas* and *dhammas* associated with those inner bodies as well. He takes the locative literally by interpreting the use of ‘in’ as ‘inside’: one has to be mindful of the body literally inside the human body, all the feelings inside the human feelings, all the *cittas* inside the human *citta* and all *dhammas* inside the human *dhammas*. It should be noted that, as his autobiography clearly points out, when Luang Pho Sot developed Sammā Arahaṃ meditation, he was already aware of and understood the content of the Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta. For example, ‘body in body’ refers to mindfulness of the four elements, the internal organs, and the breath etc. As will be shown below, Luang Pho Sot understands these practices given in the *sutta* as examples, and not an exhaustive list of practices, and that for practitioners who have attained the inner bodies, they can widen the scope of the *sutta*’s practices to apply to mindfulness of the inner bodies as well.

The following quotation is taken from another one of his earliest surviving sermons titled ‘The qualities of the Buddha, Dhamma and *saṅgha*’ given from 1945 to 1946 (63 sermons 1984: 8–44; *Compilation of Dhamma sermons* 2012: 15–54):

To have self as one’s refuge means that one must focus on, hold on to and depend on [each body] to proceed inward layer by layer. That is, focus on the human body to reach the *deva* body. Focus on the *deva* body to reach the *brahmā* body. Focus on the *brahmā* body to reach the formless *brahmā* body. Focus on the formless *brahmā* body to reach the *dhamma* body. The body is oneself, depending on each other layer by layer inwardly. Thus, one has oneself as a refuge in the meditative aspect, in this sense, as stated in detail above. The

statement *kāye kāyānupassī* in the Mahāsatipatṭhāna Sutta is further supporting evidence. *Kāyānupassī* means ‘seeing continuously or following through the seeing of the body’. *Kāye* means ‘in the body’ [...] Thus, to translate this exactly and concisely, it means to follow through the seeing of the body in the body; that is, to follow through the seeing of each body layer by layer. One sees the human body, then one follows that through to see the *deva* body, following that through to see the *brahmā* body, following that through to see the formless *brahmā* body and following that through to see the *dhamma* body. (Compilation of Dhamma sermons 2012: 53)⁵⁹

The keyword here is ‘meditative aspect’, which means that Luang Pho Sot sees the *sutta* as containing several meanings or interpretations depending on the level of understanding of the person. This passage is also a reference to two places in the *nikāya* where dwelling with oneself as an island and refuge is explained by reference to the practice of the four *satipatṭhānas*.⁶⁰ For example, the Cakkavatti-Sīhanāda Sutta (D III 77) explains that in order to have self and the Dhamma as an island and refuge, one must practise the Four Foundations of Mindfulness of seeing the body in body, feelings in feelings, *citta* in *citta* and *dhamma* in *dhamma*.

⁵⁹ ที่ว่าตนเป็นที่พึ่งแก่ตนนั้น ก็คือเพ่งยึดอาศัยกัน ดำเนินเข้าไปเป็นชั้นๆ คือ เพ่งกายมนุษย์ส่งให้ถึงกายทิพย์ เพ่งกายทิพย์ส่งให้ถึงกายรูปพรหม เพ่งกายรูปพรหมส่งให้ถึงกายอรูปพรหม เพ่งกายอรูปพรหมส่งให้ถึงธรรมกาย กายคือตน อาศัยพึ่งกันไปเป็นชั้นๆ เข้าไป เช่นนี้จึงได้ชื่อว่าตนเป็นที่พึ่งแห่งตนในด้านภาวนาตามนัยดังกล่าวไว้แล้วโดยละเอียดข้างต้นนั้น ยังมีคำว่า “กายะ กายานุปัสสี” ในมหาสติปัฏฐานสูตรเป็นหลักฐานสนับสนุนอีก กายานุปัสสี แปลว่า เห็นตามหรือตามเห็นซึ่งกาย กายะ แปลว่าในกาย [...] แปลตรงตามศัพท์ และย่นคำให้สั้นก็ว่าตามเห็นภายในกาย คือตามเห็นเข้าไปเป็นชั้นๆ เห็นกายมนุษย์ แล้วตามเข้าไปเห็นกายทิพย์ ตามเข้าไปเห็นกายรูปพรหม ตามเข้าไปเห็นกายอรูปพรหม ตามเข้าไปเห็นกายธรรม.

⁶⁰See D III 77, S V 154.

The following quote is taken from Luang Pho Sot's teaching of the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta (M I 55) given in 1954:

How do we see body in body? These human bodies that appear to us giving a sermon and listening, they are real human bodies. They can go to sleep and dream. When one dreams, another body emerges from the human body called the refined human body [...] this refined human body that we use to dream is called human body inside human body. This is called body in body. It is really seeing in this way.⁶¹

How about seeing feelings in feelings? Whatever feelings this human body has, whether joyous, suffering or neutral feeling [...] the body in the dream also has them: joy, suffering, neutral feeling, happiness and sadness.⁶²

How about seeing *citta* in *citta*? In the same way as seeing feelings in feelings. It is stated as 'seeing' and not 'knowing' [...] There is a *citta* in *citta*, that is, the *citta* of the refined human body in the dream.⁶³

⁶¹ เห็นภายในภายใน เห็นอย่างไร บัดนี้กายมนุษย์ที่ปรากฏอยู่เนืองเทศนี้อยู่นี้ ฟังเทศนี้อยู่นี้ นี่กายมนุษย์แท้ๆ แต่กายมนุษย์นี้แหละเวลานอนหลับฝันไปก็ได้ พอฝันออกไปอีกกายหนึ่ง เขาเรียกว่า กายมนุษย์ละเอียด [...] กายมนุษย์คนที่ฝันออกไปนั้นแหละ เขาเรียกว่า กายมนุษย์ในกายมนุษย์ นี่แหละภายในภายใน เห็นจริงๆ อย่างนี้.

⁶² เห็นเวทนาในเวทนาละ ก็ตัวมนุษย์คนนี้มีเวทนาอย่างไรบ้าง สุขทุกข์ ไม่สุขไม่ทุกข์ [...] ส่วนกายที่ฝันออกไปนั้นก็มีความสุข ไม่สุขไม่ทุกข์ ดีใจ เสียใจ เหมือนกัน.

⁶³ จิตละ เห็นจิตในจิต ก็แบบเดียวกันกับเวทนาในเวทนา เห็นจิตในจิตนี้ ต้องกล่าวเห็นนะ ไม่ใช่กล่าวว่ารู้นะ [...] จิตในจิต นั้นแหละอีกดวงหนึ่งคือ จิตของกายมนุษย์ละเอียด ที่ฝันออกไป.

How do we constantly see *dhamma* in *dhamma*? The *dhamma* sphere, which makes the human body, exists at the centre of the human body, the size of a hen's egg yolk. It is attached to the centre of the human body. This is seeing *dhamma* in *dhamma*. There is also a *dhamma* sphere that makes the refined human body. Not the size of an egg yolk, but twice the size [...] That is how we see it. Seeing or knowing? Seeing and knowing are different. One is seeing. The other is knowing. Do not mix up knowing and seeing. (Saman 2000: 212–3)⁶⁴

Therefore, according to Luang Pho Sot, the inner bodies, feelings, *cittas* and *dhammas* are to be both known and seen, i.e. known with wisdom and seen, not with the human eye, but with meditative vision. Feelings can also be seen and appear as spheres at the centre of each body. Happy feeling appears as a clear sphere, neutral feeling as a slightly murky and clouded sphere, and unhappy feeling as a very murky and clouded sphere (*Compilation of Dhamma sermons* 2012: 563). *Dhamma* can also be seen and this refers to the *dhamma* sphere at the centre of each body. Thus both the body and the spheres corresponding to the feelings, *citta* and *dhamma* of each body are to be seen and known. This is how, Luang Pho Sot claims, one practises *satipaṭṭhānas*.

Other *suttas* were also incorporated into Sammā Arahaṃ meditation. In offering a literal interpretation of the word 'seeing', Luang Pho Sot often cites the Vakkali Sutta (S III 119)

⁶⁴ เห็นธรรมในธรรมเนืองๆ เป็นไฉนเล่า ดวงธรรมที่ทำให้เป็นกายมนุษย์ มีอยู่ในศูนย์กลางกายมนุษย์ ขนาดเท่าฟองไข่แดงของไก่ ติดอยู่ในกลางกายมนุษย์ นี่เห็นธรรมในธรรมละ ดวงธรรมที่ทำให้เป็นกายมนุษย์ละเอียดมีอยู่ ไม่เท่าฟองไข่แดงของไก่ ๒ เท่าฟองไข่แดงของไก่ [...] นั่นเห็นอย่างนี้ เห็น หรือ รู้ ละ รู้กับเห็นมันต่างกันนะ เห็นอย่างหนึ่ง รู้อย่างหนึ่งนะ ไม่ใช่เอา รู้ กับ เห็น มาปนกัน.

to support his claim (for example, *Compilation of Dhamma sermons* 2012: 51). In this *sutta*, the Dhamma and *Tathāgata* (interpreted as synonymous with the word *dhammakāya*) are also not just mere knowledge, but visions, which one can literally see: ‘Whoever sees the Dhamma, sees me, the *Tathāgata*. Whoever sees the *Tathāgata*, sees the Dhamma’ (Ap 467).

According to Luang Pho Sot, the Eightfold Noble Path, namely *sīla* or morality, *samādhi* or concentration, *paññā* or wisdom, together with the attainments of *vimutti* or liberation, *vimuttiñāṇadassana* or knowledge and vision of liberation, are spheres to be seen within each body. Thus the path outlined in the Pāli canon and the attainments described in the Visuddhimagga are understood by Luang Pho Sot as not just knowledge alone but also vision and attainment, which one can literally ‘see’ and experience. As will be shown below, this aspect of the visions of the spheres, which are associated with various stages of the path to enlightenment, is a distinctive feature of the so-called ‘*borān yogāvacara kammaṭṭhāna*’.⁶⁵

Right concentration is defined in the Pāli canon and the Visuddhimagga as the development of mental absorptions or *jhānas*. Luang Pho Sot incorporates the practice of the four *jhānas* into the Sammā Araham meditation system as follows (*Compilation of Dhamma sermons* 2012: 250-2).⁶⁶ When one stops still at the centre of the *dhamma* sphere of the human body,

⁶⁵ See, for example, Bizot (1992: 211–224) and Crosby (2013: 93).

⁶⁶ *Jhāna* or mental absorption refers to a state of meditation in which awareness is fully absorbed in the object of meditation. The Visuddhimagga lists eight levels of *jhānas*: four *jhānas* of form (*rūpa jhāna*) and four formless *jhānas* (*arūpa jhāna*). See Vism 88, 111, 139–170, and 326–340.

one is able to enter the first *jhāna* and there arise its various factors.⁶⁷ When one reaches the *dhamma* sphere of the *deva* body, one is able to enter the second *jhāna*. When one reaches the *dhamma* sphere of the *brahmā* body, one is able to enter the third *jhāna*, and the fourth *jhāna* when one reaches the *dhamma* sphere of the formless *brahmā* body. One can also enter the four formless *jhānas* through the formless *brahmā* body.

Luang Pho Sot explains that from the crude human body to the refined formless *brahmā* body (1–8), the meditator is at the *samatha* (calm) level of meditation, but from *dhammakāya gotrabhū* to refined *dhammakāya arahatta* (9–18), the meditator moves to the *vipassanā* (insight) level of meditation.

According to Luang Pho Sot, the lower eight mundane bodies are made up of the five aggregates (*rūpa*, *vedanā*, *saññā*, *saṅkhāra* and *viññāṇa*) and possess the three characteristics of impermanence, suffering and not-self (*aniccam*, *dukkham* and *anattā*).⁶⁸ As one progresses through each mundane body, one has to abandon one's attachment to the five aggregates of the lower bodies through the contemplation of their impermanence, suffering and not-self characteristics. However, this process ends when one reaches *dhammakāya* as the 10 supra-mundane *dhammakāya* bodies are unconditioned and have the opposite characteristics of permanent, happy and self (*niccam*, *sukham* and *attā*). They are made up not of five aggregates but *dhamma* aggregate (*dhammakhandha*). These bodies

⁶⁷ The first *jhāna* consists of five factors: applied thought (*vitakka*), sustained thought (*vicāra*), joy (*pīti*), happiness (*sukha*) and one-pointedness of mind (*ekaggatā*).

⁶⁸ The five aggregates (*khandha*) are basic constituents that make up the human and other beings, namely form (*rūpa*), feelings (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*), volitions (*saṅkhāra*) and consciousness (*viññāṇa*).

are ‘liberated self’ and not ‘conventional self’ (*Compilation of Dhamma sermons* 2012: 533).⁶⁹ However, only *dhammakāya arahatta* is ‘absolutely/completely liberated’;⁷⁰ all the *dhammakāyas* below it are not completely liberated as they still have the lower and higher fetters (*saṃyojana*) to be got rid of (*Compilation of Dhamma sermons* 2012: 534).

Although some Thai scholars and practitioners criticize Sammā Arahaṃ meditation as offering only the practice of *samatha* (calm meditation) and not *vipassanā* (insight meditation),⁷¹ its developer and practitioners have always claimed that it consists of both *samatha* and *vipassanā*. How does Luang Pho Sot view the development of *vipassanā* in Sammā Arahaṃ meditation? The meditator develops *vipassanā* first by being mindful of the lower mundane bodies, feelings, *cittas* and *dhammas* and seeing their three characteristics to them. When one reaches the *dhammakāya*, Luang Pho Sot advises that one should contemplate the six *vipassanā bhūmis*, namely the five aggregates (*khandha*), 12 internal and external sense fields (*āyatana*s), 18 elements (*dhātus*), 22 faculties (*indriyas*), Four Noble Truths and 12 links of Dependent Origination (*paṭiccasamuppāda*) (*Compilation of Dhamma sermons* 2012: 324–6).⁷² With regard to the five aggregates, when one reaches the *dhammakāya* one contemplates the three characteristics of the five aggregates of all of the mundane bodies in ‘comparison with’ the opposite characteristics

⁶⁹ เป็นตนโดยวิมุตติด้วย ไม่ใช่สมมตด้วย.

⁷⁰ วิมุตติขาดแต่ดลใจไป.

⁷¹ For criticisms during Luang Pho Sot’s lifetime, see *63 sermons* (1984: (26)–(28)) and Tritha (1984: 76). For criticisms by the Rise and Fall meditation tradition, see Young Buddhists Association of Thailand (2008: 26). For recent criticisms by Thai scholars of Buddhism, see, for example, Payutto (1999: 233), Prawet Wasi (1999: 58-59) and Sathianphong Wannapok (2015). For further discussions on this issue, see Scott (2009: 80–2) and below in Chapters 2 (2.9) and 4 (4.1).

⁷² These objects of insight are described in detail in Chapters 14, 15, 16 and 17 of the Visuddhimagga and are termed *bhūmis* for the development of insight (Vism 436–586).

of the unconditioned *dhammakāya*. Therefore, Sammā Arahaṃ meditation's development of insight is not only achieved through seeing the three characteristics of the conditioned *dhammas* alone, but also through a comparison between the characteristics of the conditioned *dhammas* and the unconditioned *dhamma*. One abandons one's attachment to the five aggregates, the mundane bodies, by seeing the supra-mundane *dhammakāya*, which has the opposite characteristics.

The three characteristics of impermanence, suffering and not-self are taught not just to enable one to let go of and abandon the conditioned *dhammas* but also to point subtly to permanence, happiness and self of the ultimate *dhammakāya*, which is the true refuge. Luang Pho Sot gives a simile of two people standing side by side, one short, one tall (*Compilation of Dhamma sermons* 2012: 26–27). A man who is acquainted with the tall one would point out, when asked, that he knows the taller one. Upon hearing this, the enquirer would immediately understand that the man is not acquainted with the shorter person. Just as the tall person points to the short person, in the same way, impermanence points to permanence, suffering points to happiness and not-self points to self (*Compilation of Dhamma sermons* 2012: 27).

Selfness of the *dhammakāya* in Luang Pho Sot's understanding is synonymous with the term 'refuge'. To support this claim, Luang Pho Sot cites the following statement from the Cakkavatti-Sīhanāda Sutta (D III 77) and Mahāparinibbāna Sutta (D II 100): 'Monks, you must be ones who have self as refuge, self as shelter, nothing else as shelter. You must be

ones who have Dhamma as refuge, Dhamma as shelter, nothing else as shelter.’⁷³ Thus when one reaches *dhammakāya*, according to Luang Pho Sot, one realizes that it is self, a true self that one can take refuge in.

With this understanding, Luang Pho Sot interprets the statement that ‘all *dhammas* are not-self’ (Dhp 277–280 and S III 134) as referring to all conditioned *dhammas* (*saṅkhatadhamma*). This statement does not refer to the unconditioned *dhammakāya*, as he has in meditation understood it to be the true self. Luang Pho Sot has found that the minds and bodies of the mundane bodies are still subject to the three characteristics and that there is no refuge to be found in them. However, when one reaches the *dhammakāya*, one realizes that it has the opposite characteristics. The mind of the *dhammakāya* is permanent, happy and self, and can be taken as a true refuge. Self in Luang Pho Sot’s sense is therefore linked to permanence, happiness and, most importantly, being a true refuge. It is important to point out that Luang Pho Sot tries to demonstrate that his understanding conforms to the authority of the Pāli canonical statements. This process is continued by Achan Sermchai, who tries to demonstrate that it is also in conformity with the Pāli commentaries and subcommentaries and views of respected Thai monks. For example, one of the respected Thai monks Achan Sermchai often cited and referred to is Saṅgharāja Phae Tissadevo (1856–1944), whose sermon ‘Attānudiṭṭhi’ (View of Self), published in a book titled *Therapaṇṇatti*, argues that *nibbāna* is self.⁷⁴

⁷³ D III 77: *attadīpā bhikkhave viharatha attasaraṇā anaññasaraṇā dhammadīpā dhammasaraṇā anaññasaraṇā*.

⁷⁴ Saṅgharāja Phae was the abbot of Wat Suthat Dhepwararam Rachaworamahawihan (Wat Suthat) and the 12th Saṅgharāja of Bangkok from 1938 to 1944. Today, he is known widely as the maker of the Wat Suthat amulets. See Phae Tissadevo (2001) and Phuttathamprathip (2001: back cover). For an English summary of

Moreover, according to Luang Pho Sot, *nibbāna* is located in the mind of the *dhammakāya*. When the Buddhas and *arahants* still possess the five aggregates, they can reach the state of *nibbāna* in their minds at the centre of their *dhammakāyas*. When the Buddhas and *arahants* pass away into final *nibbāna*, their five aggregates break up, and their *dhammakāyas* will forever dwell in *āyatana* (*nibbāna*). Luang Pho Sot connects these two types of *nibbāna* to two terms found in the *nikāyas*: 1) *saupādisesa nibbānadhātu* (*nibbāna* element realized with the five aggregates remaining); and 2) *anupādisesa nibbānadhātu* (*nibbāna* element without the five aggregates remaining) (for example, It 38–39). The first term refers to the extinction of the defilements of greed, hatred and delusion, i.e. the attainment of the *nibbāna* while the Buddha and *arahants* are still alive; and the second refers to the state of *nibbāna* when the Buddha and *arahants* die. The word *upādi*, meaning ‘something that one grasps, to which one clings’, here refers to the five aggregates that the Buddha and *arahants* still possess while they are alive (Nyanatiloka 2004: 155–6 and 202–3). The commentaries term these two types of *nibbāna* elements as, firstly, *kilesaparinibbāna*, ‘the quenching of defilements’ at enlightenment, and, secondly, *khandhaporinibbāna*, ‘the quenching of the continuum of aggregates’ at the death of the Buddha and *arahants* (Bodhi 2000: 50).⁷⁵

Saṅgharāja Phae’s and Achan Sermchai’s arguments regarding *nibbāna* as self, see my book, *Nibbāna as self or not-self: Some contemporary Thai discussions* (Potprecha 2009: Chapters 1 and 3).

⁷⁵ For discussions regarding the two terms, see Hwang (2006: 14–35), Collins: (2010: 39–42) and Harvey (2012: 180–2).

Another controversial aspect of Sammā Arahaṃ meditation is the idea of *nibbāna* as a dwelling place or *āyatana*.⁷⁶ When Luang Pho Sot describes *nibbāna* as a dwelling place, he does not mean that it is literally a physical dwelling place. According to his description of *āyatana* (*nibbāna*) in the *Abbot's handbook*, it is an unconditioned, supra-mundane and supra-physical realm higher and more refined than three realms (*63 sermons* 1984: (319)). It is beyond the physical; there is no earth, no water, no fire, no wind, no sun, no moon, no going, no coming, no standing, no arising and no birth in it (*63 sermons* 1984: (319—20)). When describing *āyatana* (*nibbāna*), Luang Pho Sot often cites the famous Udāna passage (Ud 80) to support his claim (for example, *63 sermons* 1984: (319—20)). It is one of the four *suttas* in the Udāna or ‘Spirited Utterances’ about which the Buddha instructed a group of monks regarding the state of *nibbāna*. It is a passage where *nibbāna* appears to be characterized as a real existing reality as opposed to merely the destruction of defilements, a controversial issue in early Buddhist thought:⁷⁷

There is, monks, *āyatana* where there is neither earth, nor water, nor fire, nor wind, nor that base consisting of endless space, nor that base consisting of endless consciousness, nor that base consisting of nothingness, nor that base consisting of neither perception nor non-perception, nor this world, nor the next world, nor both sun and moon in that *āyatana*. Monks, I do not

⁷⁶ This aspect along with the teaching of *nibbāna* as self were criticized during Luang Pho Sot's lifetime: for example, see *63 sermons* (1984: (26)—(28)). Similar criticisms were also levelled at Dhammakaya Temple during its crisis around the year 1999. See, for example, Payutto (1999: 233) and Sathianphong (1999: 80). For discussions regarding the 1999 *nibbāna* debates and controversy, see Potprecha (2009: Chapter 2), Mackenzie (2007: 98–102) and Scott (2009: 147–149).

⁷⁷ For discussions regarding the Ud 80 passage, see Collins (1998: 164–166, 215–216), Gethin (1998: 76–77), and Williams and Tribe (2000: 49–52).

speak of that *āyatana* that it is coming, or going, or remaining, or falling, or arising. That *āyatana* is without foundation, without occurrence, without object. This is the end of *dukkha*.⁷⁸

2.3 Luang Pho Niam Dhammajoti's and Luang Pho Nong Indasuvanno's teachings as sources of Sammā Arahaṃ meditation

Luang Pho Sot's understanding of the practice of *satipaṭṭhānas* as extending to one's inner bodies, feelings, minds and *dhammas*, as well as the human body, may seem unique and unusual to today's practitioners. However, as this section will reveal, Luang Pho Sot adopted this practice from the teachings of two of his former teachers, namely Luang Pho Niam, Wat Noi and Luang Pho Nong Indasuvanno, Wat Amphawan, Suphanburi.

Among the meditation teachers mentioned in Luang Pho Sot's autobiography were the well-known masters of Suphanburi province, Luang Pho Niam Dhammajoti, Wat Noi (1828–1909) and Luang Pho Nong Indasuvanno, Wat Amphawan (1865–1933). Luang Pho Niam is today known for being the meditation teacher of many venerated monks in central Thailand. Apart from Luang Pho Sot, Luang Pho Niam also taught Luang Pho Nong Indasuvanno; Luang Pho Pan Sonando, Wat Bang Khonom, Ayutthaya; and Phra Ratchaphromyan (Wira Thāvaro), Wat Tha Sung, Uthai Thani. Luang Pho Sot knew all of

⁷⁸ Ud 80: *atthi bhikkhave tad āyatanaṃ. yattha n' eva paṭhavī na āpo na tejo na vāyo na ākāśānañcāyatanaṃ na viññāṇañcāyatanaṃ na ākiñcaṇṇāyatanaṃ na nevasaññānāsaññāyatanaṃ nāyaṃ loko na paraloko na ubho candimasuriyā. tam ahaṃ bhikkhave n' eva āgatiṃ vadāmi na gatiṃ na ṭhitiṃ na cutiṃ. na uppattiṃ appaṭiṭṭhaṃ appavattaṃ anārammaṇaṃ eva taṃ. es' ev' anto dukkhassā ti.*

these monks well. He studied meditation under Luang Pho Niam at Wat Noi together with Luang Pho Pan Sonando and later taught Phra Ratchaphromyan. Phra Ratchaphromyan or, as he is popularly known, Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam (Black Monkey Sage) was a meditation student of all of the above monks, including Luang Pho Sot. Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam is known for founding the popular Manomayiddhi meditation tradition, for having given meditation instructions to King Bhumibol Adulyadej (Rama IX, r. 1946–2016),⁷⁹ and for making a number of famous prophesies on the future of Thailand. Luang Pho Nong Indasuvanṇo, a senior pupil of Luang Pho Niam, was Luang Pho Sot's ordination-proclaiming teacher (*anusāvanācāriya*) at Wat Songphinong, Suphanburi.⁸⁰ He was a good friend of Luang Pho Pan and the teacher of Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam. As I have discovered in my research, this network of meditation teachers share similar understandings of *nibbāna*, the visions of the Buddha in meditation and the attainment of inner bodies.

Luang Pho Niam Dhammajoti was born in the reign of King Nangklao (Rama III, r. 1824–1851) and died in the reign of King Chulalongkorn (Rama V, r. 1868–1910).⁸¹ He ordained in Suphanburi and later moved to Bangkok to study the scriptures, meditation and other

⁷⁹ See, for example, Wat Tha Sung's website: <http://www.watthasung.com/wat/viewthread.php?tid=772>.

⁸⁰ The *anusāvanācāriya* is the ordination-proclaiming teacher or the second ordination teacher. The *anusāvanācāriya*, together with the preceptor (*upajjhāya*) and the act-announcing teacher (*kammavācācāriya*), are the three main monks responsible for conducting an ordination ceremony. The *kammavācācāriya* and *anusāvanācāriya* are called the 'chanting pair' (*khusuat*) as their duties are to question the candidate on his suitability to be a monk and make a formal proposal to the gathering that he be admitted into the community.

⁸¹ The biographical information on Luang Pho Niam is taken from *The biography of Luang Pho Niam Wat Noi, Khok Khram subdistrict Bang Plama district, Suphanburi province* published in 2015. The book was compiled and edited by Saman Kanmon and Sutchai Sutthaphon to be distributed at the funeral of Wiphawan Tonsaiphiet. The biography states that it obtained the information from different sources, including amulet magazines, the accounts of Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam, the accounts of the descendants of Luang Pho Niam's relatives, other monks and lay students etc. (Saman 2015: 18, 24, 26 and 41).

sciences. The authors of the biography speculate that one of the monks he studied with in Bangkok was the famous Somdet To Brahmaramsī as Luang Pho Niam's move to Bangkok coincided with the period of Somdet To's residence at Wat Rakhang, Thonburi (Saman 2015: 25).⁸² They both lived in the Bangkok/Thonburi area around the early 1850s to early 1870s. The biography also speculated that he studied with Achan Chan at Wat Phlap (Saman 2015: 25). As I shall show below, Wat Phlap (Wat Ratchasittharam), at that time, was one of the main centres of meditation practice in Bangkok, which taught the method of Saṅgharāja Suk Kai Thuean. After living in Bangkok for 20 years, he went back to Suphanburi and was appointed the abbot of Wat Noi where he lived until his death in 1909 at the age of 81.

The autobiography states that right after his ordination at Wat Songphinong, Luang Pho Sot went to study with Luang Pho Nong, and then later went to Wat Noi to study with Luang Pho Niam (*63 sermons* 1984: (3)). Thus they were Luang Pho Sot's first two meditation teachers. Luang Pho Sot must have visited Luang Pho Niam between 1905 and 1909, the years of Luang Pho Sot's ordination and Luang Pho Niam's death. His visit to Wat Noi must have been due to the recommendation of Luang Pho Nong, who also studied with Luang Pho Niam. According to Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam's account, Luang Pho Sot was particularly close to his teacher, Luang Pho Pan, as they both examined each other's meditation progress while studying with Luang Pho Niam. Later, Luang Pho Pan

⁸² Somdet To Brahmaramsī (1788–1872), the late abbot of Wat Rakhang, Thonburi, is today regarded as one of the most prominent Thai Buddhist monastic teachers of the 19th century, a holy monk whose legendary life, teaching methods, amulets and chanting texts are still widely known and revered today. He is widely considered an *arahant* or a bodhisattva, and his images are found in temples throughout Thailand. His amulets are known for their protective powers and are among the most expensive in the market.

recommended Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam to visit Wat Pakam for one month to study Sammā Arahaṃ meditation with Luang Pho Sot (Sangsuwan 1989: part 7).

Luang Pho Niam's biographers claim that he was adept in *vāyo* (wind) *kaṣiṇa* and possessed many higher knowledges and powers (*abhiññā*).⁸³ The wind *kaṣiṇa* is one of the 10 *kaṣiṇa* exercises, which are external devices or objects of meditation aimed at developing mental concentration and the four *jhānas*.⁸⁴ The biography is full of stories of Luang Pho Niam's abilities to cure snake bites, read others' minds, know the future, travel long distances in very short periods of time, etc. (Saman 2015: 12–66). His amulets are, reportedly, sources of many miracles and are often mentioned in amulet collectors' magazines and on their websites.

⁸³ *Abhiññā* consist of six higher knowledges and powers, five mundane: 1) supernatural powers (*iddhi*); 2) divine ear (*dibbasota*); 3) mind-reading ability (*cetopariyañāṇa*); 4) recollection of past lives (*pubbenivāsānussati*); and 5) divine eye (*dibbacakkhu*), and one supra-mundane: 6) cessation of mental intoxicants (*āsavakkhaya*). See, for example, Dasuttara Sutta (D III 272).

⁸⁴ A list of 10 *kaṣiṇas* (earth, water, fire, wind, blue, yellow, red, white, space and consciousness) is mentioned in the *nikāyas*: for example, the Mahāsakuludāyī Sutta (M II 1). In chapters four and five of the Visuddhimagga (Vism 118–177), the *kaṣiṇas* are included among the forty objects used for the development of *samatha* meditation.



Figure 2.4: *Stūpa* containing ashes of Luang Pho Niam and an image of Luang Niam at Wat Noi, Suphanburi (photograph taken by the author).



Figure 2.5: Painting of Luang Pho Niam at Wat Noi, Suphanburi, titled ‘Luang Pho Niam was compassionate to animals’ (photograph taken by the author). Worshippers like to offer miniature clay dogs as gifts to Luang Pho Niam.

Luang Pho Nong Indasuvanno was one of Luang Pho Niam’s most trusted students.⁸⁵ According to Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam, Luang Pho Niam is said to have told Luang Pho Pan that after he died, he should consult Luang Pho Nong for meditation guidance (Phra Ratchaphromyan 2005: 221). Luang Pho Nong received most of his meditation training from Luang Pho Niam. Initially, he intended to study in Bangkok and travelled to Wat Pho

⁸⁵ Biographical information from *The biography of Luang Pho Nong Indasuvanno Wat Amphawan Songphinong subdistrict Suphanburi province*, published by Wat Amphawan. The preface states that the book is written by ‘pupils of Luang Pho Nong’ and published on the occasion of the completion of a Mandapa at Wat Amphawan dedicated to him.

to stay with his uncle, a high-ranking monk who held the ninth-grade Pāli. But upon seeing the collection of expensive antiques and other treasures among his uncle's personal belongings, he felt disheartened and lost faith in Bangkok scholarly monks and he went back to Suphanburi to study with Achan Chan, Wat Thung Khok, his preceptor, and later with Luang Pho Niam (Wat Amphawan n.d.: 3–4). Like Luang Pho Niam, Luang Pho Nong is also known for his *abhiññā* and amulets. He was able to foretell events, and friends' and students' visits without prior notice. It is likely that Luang Pho Sot knew Luang Pho Nong prior to becoming a monk. Wat Amphawan, also known as Wat Klong Madan, is situated in Songphinong district, the same district as Wat Songphinong and where Luang Pho Sot was born. The two temples are walking distance from each other. There is a canal, Klong Madan, that connects Wat Amphawan to Wat Songphinong and the Tha Chin river. Thus it is possible that he may have known Luang Pho Nong, and visited and studied with him before his ordination. Apart from being the teacher of Luang Pho Sot and Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam, Luang Pho Nong was also the act-announcing teacher (*kammavācācāriya*) of Luang Pho Sot's nephew, Somdet Pun Puṇṇasiri of Wat Pho, the author of the first biography of Luang Pho Sot. As I mentioned above, Luang Pho Sot and Somdet Pun were both ordained at Wat Songphinong. Somdet Pun became the temporary abbot of Wat Paknam from 1959 to 1966 prior to becoming the abbot of Wat Pho and being appointed Saṅgharāja in 1971.



Figure 2.6: Photograph of Luang Pho Nong in Luang Pho Pan’s biography (Phra Ratchaphromyan 2005: iv). The caption states that Luang Pho Nong, like Luang Pho Pan, was a pupil of Luang Pho Niam. Luang Pho Niam told Luang Pho Pan: “[If] I die, Luang Pho Nong, Wat Klong Madan, is to replace me [as your teacher].” Luang Pho Nong died in a reclining posture. His corpse did not decay and appeared like he was sleeping 13 months after his death.



Figure 2.7: Shrine dedicated to Luang Pho Nong at Wat Amphawan, Suphanburi
(photograph taken by the author).

Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam's accounts of his meditation trainings with them are mentioned in a book titled *Pastime reading vol. 17*.⁸⁶ This book presents Luang Pho Niam's and Luang Pho Nong's understanding of *nibbāna*, their method of visualizing the Buddha image and visions of inner bodies in meditation. I came across this book by chance as I was browsing through Wat Thasung's website while doing research regarding Luang Pho Sot's influences outside the *Sammā Arahaṃ* tradition. Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam visited Luang Pho Niam and Luang Pho Nong around the years 1936 and 1937. He visited Luang Pho Nong twice

⁸⁶ หนังสืออ่านเล่น เล่มที่ ๑๗. Published in 1989 by Wat Tha Sung, Uthai Thani province, the book is divided into eight parts: 1) Prophecies of the Buddha; 2) – 4) Meditation training with Luang Pho Nong Indasuvanno; 5) – 6) Meditation training with Luang Pho Niam; 7) and 8) Accounts of Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam's forest wandering with Luang Pho Pan. The book is out of print, but its internet version can be downloaded from Wat Tha Sung's website: <http://www.watthasung.com/wat/viewthread.php?tid=1598>.

before visiting Luang Pho Niam, and this book records these visits in chronological order. His visits were due to the recommendations of Luang Pho Pan, his main teacher. As I mentioned above, Luang Pho Pan and Luang Pho Sot practised meditation together under Luang Pho Niam's guidance. In the first part, titled 'Prophecies of the Buddha',⁸⁷ Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam states that there have been many monks who were able to visit *nibbāna* and communicate with the Buddha in meditation. These monks convinced him to abandon the view that '*nibbāna* is a state that is void' (Phra Ratchaphromyan 1989: 1).⁸⁸ These monks include: Luang Pho Niam; Luang Pho Nong; Luang Pho Pan Sonando; Luang Pho Chong, Wat Natang Nok, Ayutthaya; and Luang Pho Sang, Wat Namtao, Ayutthaya (Phra Ratchaphromyan 1989: 1).⁸⁹

In parts 2 and 3 of this book, Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam recounts his visit to Luang Pho Nong. He states that Luang Pho Nong is an important meditation master who was able to 'communicate with Buddhas and *arahants*' in *nibbāna* (Phra Ratchaphromyan 1989: 2). There is not much detail on Luang Pho Nong's meditation method. However, from various passages in parts 2 and 3 of this book, it can be summarized that Luang Pho Nong taught the method of contemplation of the body (*kāyagatāsati*), contemplating the different parts and organs, in conjunction with *buddhānussati*, the visualization of various Buddhas in

⁸⁷ พุทธพยากรณ์.

⁸⁸ นิพพานมีสภาพสูญ.

⁸⁹ Very little information regarding Luang Pho Chong (1872–1964) and Luang Pho Sang (1894–?) is provided by Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam. Luang Pho Pan's biography states that Luang Pho Pan instructed Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam to follow Luang Pho Chong into the forest and practise meditation under his guidance (Phra Ratchaphromyan 2005: v). Luang Pho Sang was a student of Luang Pho Chong; Luang Pho Sun, Wat Bang Plamo, Ayutthaya; and Luang Pho Pan, Wat Phikun, Ayutthaya (Phra Ratchaphromyan 2005: vi). They were both widely respected meditation masters of Ayutthaya whose amulets are also well known and often featured in amulet collectors' magazines (for biographical information see Piyanai 2017b and Saksi 2018).

one's head and chest accompanied by the recitation of the word '*buddho*'. With regard to the recollection of the Buddha, Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam states that he was able to visualize two Buddhas in his chest: the Buddha Gotama and an unnamed *paccekabuddha*; and two Buddhas in his head: the Buddha Dīpaṅkara and the Buddha Kassapa (Phra Ratchaphromyan 1989: 3). It is not stated why these four Buddhas were chosen. The Buddha Dīpaṅkara is, in the Theravāda tradition, the 24th Buddha prior to the Buddha Gotama and the one who predicted the Buddha Gotama's future enlightenment. The Buddha Kassapa is the Buddha immediately prior to the Buddha Gotama. In the Mahāpadāna Sutta (D II 1), the Buddha Kassapa is listed sixth among the six previous Buddhas and the third Buddha of this fortunate aeon, Gotama Buddha being the fourth of this aeon. He was born into the Brahman caste and had a lifespan of 20,000 years. These two Buddhas appear in the late canonical text Buddhavaṃsa in the Khuddaka Nikāya among the list of 28 Buddhas of the past and present.⁹⁰ A *paccekabuddha* or solitary/silent Buddha is a type of Buddha who achieves enlightenment by himself but, unlike the fully enlightened Buddha, does not lead others to enlightenment and does not establish a dispensation. Perhaps the point of visualizing the Buddhas Dīpaṅkara and Kassapa is that they are first and last: the Buddha Dīpaṅkara is the Buddha before whom Buddha Gotama first makes his *bodhisatta* vow and the Buddha Kassapa is the last Buddha prior to Buddha Gotama's enlightenment.

The most interesting figure here is the *paccekabuddha*. Solitary Buddhas are rarely mentioned in the Pāli canonical texts. For example, in the Isigili Sutta (M III 68), 500

⁹⁰ For a discussion of the lineages of previous Buddhas, see Reynolds (1997: 19–39).

solitary Buddhas are said to have dwelt in the Isigili mountain near Rājagaha. In Darīmukha Jātaka (No. 378, J III 244), the *bodhisatta*, the king of Magadha, had a friend named Darīmukha who achieves *pacceka* enlightenment, and after 40 years he visits the king and preaches to him the benefits of renunciation. The *bodhisatta*, inspired by Darīmukha's sermon, renounces his kingdom and becomes an ascetic. Solitary Buddhas practise their perfections for at least 2,000 *asaṅkheyya kappas* (incalculable aeons); although they do not lead others to attain *nibbāna*, they can act as recipients of offerings and their ethical teachings can lead others to heavenly rebirths (Malalasekera 2007: 94–5). They are important figures in Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam's Manomayiddhi tradition. The *paccekabuddha* mantra is often given in Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam's sermons and books and there is a *vihāra* dedicated to them at Wat Tha Sung.

Having seen the four Buddhas constantly every day in his body, he is taught to master the eight *jhānas* and cultivate the insight knowledges (*vipassanāññāṇa*). Having completed this stage, he was able to visit *nibbāna*. Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam states that whenever Luang Pho Nong wanted to teach, he would purify his mind to rid it of the five hindrances and the ten fetters (*samyojana*), and when his mind is endowed with the insight knowledges (*vipassanāññāṇa*) and without attachment (*upadāna*), he would invite the Buddha in *nibbāna* to preach to his students (Phra Ratchaphromyan 1989: 3). The Buddha would emit one of the rays of six colours (*chabbaṇaramsī*) into Luang Pho Nong's mind, which would cause him to speak according to the Buddha's words (Phra Ratchaphromyan 1989: 3).⁹¹

⁹¹ ฉัพพรรณรังสี. The rays of six colours are found in the commentary to the Dhammasaṅgaṇi (Dhs-a 13). It is stated that the Buddha's body emits these rays at the end of the fourth week after enlightenment when he contemplates the Paṭṭhāna. The Paṭṭhāna is the last book of the Abhidhamma Piṭaka, which provides a

The state of *nibbāna*, according to Luang Pho Nong, is as follows:

Many of you may think *nibbāna* is void. When it is void, how can one meet them [the Buddhas and *arahants*]. This is the scholars' view. But for the practitioners who have acquired at least the three knowledges [*viññā*] and further, it is not beyond their capacities. It is certainly possible. Because *nibbāna* is void, but void only of defilements, void of evil. Its true nature, which is that the *citta*'s power, is not void, and has a *deva* state. They said that it is a special *deva* state that does not move anywhere. (Phra Ratchaphromyan 1989: 2)⁹²

Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam explains that not moving anywhere here means that one is no longer reborn in *samsāra* (cycle of rebirths) and no longer receives the fruits of bad *kamma* (Phra Ratchaphromyan 1989: 2). He further adds that Luang Pho Nong is a well-respected master, revered even by the highest-ranking monks of Bangkok. When Somdet Phra Buddhaghosācāriya (Luang Pho Heng) of Wat Mahathat wanted to perform the ceremony of burying boundary stones (*luknimit*) at Wat Pat Khlong Songphinong, he was willing to wait for Luang Pho Nong all night and did not begin the ceremony until Luang Pho Nong

detailed examination of causal conditioning. It enumerates and explains the 24 types of *paccayas* or modes of conditionality in order to demonstrate the conditioned nature of all mental and physical phenomena (Nyanatiloka 2004: 125).

⁹² หลายคนคิดว่า นิพพานมีสภาพสูญ ในเมื่อสูญไปแล้วจะพบกันได้อย่างไร นี่นักตำรา แต่นักปฏิบัติเขาได้ตั้งแต่วิชชาสามชั้นไป เขาบอกว่า ไม่ใช่ของเกินวิสัย มันเป็นของทำได้แน่นอน เพราะนิพพานนั้นสูญจริง สูญแต่กิเลส สูญแต่ความชั่ว แต่ว่าตัวจริงๆคือ กำลังจิตไม่สูญไปด้วย มีความเป็นทิพย์ เขาเรียกว่าทิพย์พิเศษไม่มีการเคลื่อนไหวไปทางไหนอีก.

was present. When Luang Pho Nong arrived the next morning, Luang Pho Heng asked for Luang Pho Nong's instructions and performed the ceremony exactly according to his advice (Phra Ratchaphromyan 1989: 4). It is believed that these instructions did not come from Luang Pho Nong, but the Buddha himself (Phra Ratchaphromyan 1989: 4).

Parts 5 and 6 of the book record the accounts of Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam's meditation training under Luang Pho Niam. Not long after Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam returned to Wat Bang Khonom, Ayutthaya, from Wat Amphawan, he was sent by Luang Pho Pan back to Suphanburi to see Luang Pho Niam at Wat Noi. When he first saw Luang Pho Niam, Luang Pho Niam had the appearance of a very old man of almost 80, but when Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam went to receive meditation lessons in Luang Pho Niam's meditation hut, Luang Pho Niam's appearance had miraculously changed to a young man in his late twenties and was almost unrecognizable (Phra Ratcha Promyan 1989: 5). It is explained that Luang Pho Niam, like his student, Luang Pho Nong, was 'a monk who is overlapped by the Buddha'.⁹³ The young person whom Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam saw was not Luang Pho Niam but the Buddha who had assumed⁹⁴ Luang Pho Niam's body (Phra Ratchaphromyan 1989: 5). Luang Pho Niam's meditation method consists of contemplating the 32 parts of the body as unattractive (*asubha*).⁹⁵ He also taught the cultivation of eight *jhānas*, insight knowledges, and using those to purify one's mind from the 10 fetters.

⁹³ พระซ้อนพระ.

⁹⁴ สวมกาย.

⁹⁵ The canonical standard list of parts of the body, for example, in the Mahāsatipatṭhāna Sutta (D II 290) and Kāyagatāsati Sutta (M III 88), consists of 31 parts: head hairs, body hairs, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, tendons, bones, bone marrow, kidneys, heart, liver, pleura, spleen, lungs, large intestines, small intestines, undigested food, faeces, bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat, tears, skin oil, saliva, mucus, fluid in the joints and urine. However, in two places in the Khuddaka Nikāya (Paṭi I 6 and Khp 3) and in the Visuddhimagga (240), the brain (*matthaluṅga*) is mentioned as the 32nd part.

The most important aspect in Luang Pho Niam's teaching is his understanding of the contemplation of the body (*kāyagatāsati*). According to Luang Pho Niam, in order to understand the contemplation of the body in greater depth, one has to be able to see one's inner bodies and the bodies of *devas* and *brahmā*, and the bodies of stream enterers (*sotāpanna*), once returners (*sakadāgāmi*), non-returners (*anāgāmi*), and *arahants* who have passed into *nibbāna* and compare one's bodies with theirs:

When our bodies are bad, made up of the four elements assembled together and having 32 characteristics, full of dirtiness and repulsiveness, we turn to see the bodies that are *devas*, bodies of gods, bodies of goddesses, bodies of *brahmās*, bodies of *arahants* and Buddhas who have passed into *nibbāna*. They are better than our bodies. Then, look at our inner bodies. Our outer bodies are dirty, but are our inner bodies radiant? We must always see our inner bodies as being as radiant as the noble ones' [*ariyas*]. [...] Like the stream enterers who have already died, look at our bodies, are our inner bodies as beautiful as theirs? The once returners and non-returners as well, are we like them? If not like them, then, it is not good enough, we are still very bad. Then, look at the bodies of *arahants*, how beautiful they are. Are our inner bodies as beautiful as theirs? If not, then, we are still very bad. (Phra Ratchaphromyan 1989: 6)⁹⁶

⁹⁶ ในเมื่อร่างกายของเรามันก็เลว มันเป็นธาตุ ๔ ที่เข้าประชุมกัน มีอาการ ๓๒ เต็มไปด้วยความสกปรกโสโครก เราหันไปดูร่างกายที่เป็นทิพย์ ร่างกายเทวดา ร่างกายนางฟ้า ร่างกายพรหม ร่างกายพระอรหันต์ และพระพุทธเจ้าที่ท่านนิพพานแล้ว ดีกว่าร่างกายนี้ แล้วก็จะดูร่างกายภายในของเรา ภายนอกมันสกปรก ภายในเราฟ่องใสไหม ต้องดูร่างกายภายในให้ฟ่องใสคล้าย พระอริยเจ้าไว้เสมอ [...] อย่างพระโสดาบัน ท่านตายไปแล้ว ดูร่างกายของเรา สวยเหมือนท่านไหม ร่างกายภายใน และพระสภิกขาคามี อนาคามีก็

Luang Pho Niam further instructs Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam to constantly purify his mind and inner bodies until they become as pure and as beautiful as the *arahants*' (Phra Ratcha Promayan 1989: 6). Luang Pho Niam understands *nibbāna* as a special *deva* state that is beyond the states of *devas* and *brahmā*:

Nibbāna still has a *deva* state. *Deva* that is beyond *brahmā*. The first type of *devas* is the gods and goddesses in heaven. The second type of *devas* is the *brahmās*. The third type of *devas* is *nibbāna*, the highest *deva*. (Phra Ratcha Promyan 1989: 5)⁹⁷

I visited both temples and received confirmations from Phra Khru Baitika Samat (Khantivaro), the abbot of Wat Noi, and Phra Khru Inthasuwankhun (Achan Phi), the abbot of Wat Amphawan, that Luang Pho Sot was a meditation student of Luang Pho Niam and Luang Pho Nong, respectively.⁹⁸ However, they were unable to provide me with further information regarding Luang Pho Niam's and Luang Pho Nong's lives and teachings.

Sammā Arahaṃ meditation	Luang Pho Niam and Luang Pho Nong
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เหมือนกัน เหมือนท่านใหม่ ถ้าไม่เหมือนท่าน ยังใช้ไม่ได้ ยังเลวมาก ต่อไปก็ให้ดูร่างกายพระอรหันต์ท่านสวยขนาดไหน ร่างกายของเราสวยถึงขนาดนั้นแล้วหรือยัง ร่างกายภายใน ถ้ายัง ก็ถือว่า เรายังเลวมาก.

⁹⁷ นิพพานยังมีสภาพเป็นทิพย์ ทิพย์ยิ่งกว่าพรหม ความเป็นทิพย์อันดับแรกคือ เทวดา หรือนางฟ้า สวรรค์ ทิพย์ที่ ๒ ก็คือ พรหม ทิพย์ที่ ๓ ก็คือ นิพพาน ทิพย์สูงสุด.

⁹⁸ On 4 January 2017.

Extension of the four <i>satipaṭṭhānas</i> to include inner bodies and the feelings, <i>cittas</i> and <i>dhammas</i> of the inner bodies as well as the human body	Extension of <i>kāyagatāsati</i> to include the inner bodies as well as the human body
Visions of the practitioner's inner bodies which correspond to the bodies of <i>devas</i> , <i>brahmā</i> , formless <i>brahmā</i> and the <i>dhammakāyas</i> of all noble persons (<i>ariyapuggalas</i>)	Visions of the practitioner's inner bodies in comparison with the bodies of <i>devas</i> , <i>brahmā</i> and all the noble persons who have died
The vision of <i>dhammakāya</i> appearing like a translucent Buddha image overlapping the practitioner's body	The vision of the Buddha overlapping the practitioner's body; no mention of <i>dhammakāya</i>
Hierarchy of inner bodies including both coarse and refined bodies	Hierarchy of inner bodies; no division into coarse and refined bodies
<i>Nibbāna</i> as an unconditioned realm (<i>āyatana</i>) where one could see the <i>dhammakāyas</i> of the enlightened ones	<i>Nibbāna</i> as a special <i>deva</i> state that is higher than <i>brahmā</i> and beyond <i>saṃsāra</i> where one could see and come into contact with the Buddha
Seven bodily bases including the head and the chest	Two bodily bases: the head and the chest
Visualization of a crystal sphere; no visualization of previous and present Buddhas and <i>paccekabuddha</i>	Visualization of four Buddhas in one's head and one's chest; no mention of visualization of a crystal sphere

Recitation of <i>sammā araham</i>	Recitation of <i>buddho</i>
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Table 2.1: Main similarities and differences between Sammā Arahaṃ meditation and the teachings of Luang Pho Niam and Luang Pho Nong

The above table shows the main similarities and differences between Luang Pho Sot's Sammā Arahaṃ meditation and the teachings of Luang Pho Niam and Luang Pho Nong. For the sake of clarity, I shall group these two teachers' teachings together as I assume that as Luang Pho Nong was Luang Pho Niam's most trusted student, they both practise the same or similar visualization methods and share the same understanding of the contemplation of the body (*kāyagatāsati*) and the hierarchy of inner bodies.

Some of the similarities are apparent to the extent that it is clear that Luang Pho Sot has borrowed and adapted these aspects and incorporated them into Sammā Arahaṃ meditation. Although there is no mention of the term *dhammakāya* and no description of it as appearing like a translucent Buddha image, the vision of a Buddha 'overlapping' one's body in the two masters' teachings is very similar to the vision of *dhammakāya* as having the same centre (seventh base) as the human body but bigger in size. As I shall show below, the visions of the Buddha and spiritual bodies also appear in other traditional meditation texts, for example in Saṅgharāja Suk Kai Thuean of Wat Ratchasittharam's tradition, in Cambodian texts examined by François Bizot and in Wat Pradusongtham Ayutthaya's text in the Chai Yasothonrat's anthology. Luang Pho Niam and Luang Pho Nong connect these visions to the practice of *kāyagatāsati*. This extension of *kāyagatāsati* to include the inner

bodies is, in my opinion, one of the major influences on Luang Pho Sot's Sammā Arahaṃ meditation.

Luang Pho Niam's and Luang Pho Nong's visions of inner bodies are seen in comparison with the bodies of *devas*, *brahmā* and every single type of noble person who has died as well. This hierarchy of inner bodies and the maintaining of one's body to be as radiant as the noble ones' are major influences on Luang Pho Sot's development of the 18-body system, and the understanding of different levels of *dhammakāyas* as corresponding to the different types of *ariyapuggalas*. Whereas Luang Pho Niam's and Luang Pho Nong's contemplation, being based on *kāyagatāsati*, consists of being mindful of the inner bodies, Luang Pho Sot, by incorporating the practice of four *satipaṭṭhānas* into Sammā Arahaṃ meditation, extends Luang Pho Niam's and Luang Pho Nong's contemplation further to include the feelings, *cittas* and *dhammas* of the inner bodies as well. Luang Pho Sot also extends Luang Pho Niam's and Luang Pho Nong's list of inner bodies into the coarse and refined versions of each type and also adds refined human and formless *brahmā* bodies to the list. However, there is no mention of comparing one's body with the bodies of other individuals in Sammā Arahaṃ meditation. As Luang Pho Sot views the inner bodies as manifesting simultaneously when the purity of mind of that level is achieved, it is assumed that one would know which level one is at when one sees each of the inner bodies.

Moreover, Luang Pho Nong's and Luang Pho Niam's understanding of *nibbāna* as a special *deva* state that is higher than *brahmā* and beyond *saṃsāra* is also an influence on Luang Pho Sot's understanding of *nibbāna*. Although there is no mention of *attā*,

dhammakāya and *āyatana* (*nibbāna*) in Luang Pho Nong's and Luang Pho Niam's teachings, their understanding that Buddhas and *arahants* in *nibbāna* still possess some kind of supra-mundane *cittas* and bodies, and can be seen, contacted and invited to preach in the human world, bears certain similarities to Luang Pho Sot's understanding of the *dhammakāya* of Buddhas and *arahants* dwelling in *āyatana* (*nibbāna*).

The understanding that past Buddhas and *arahants* in *nibbāna* still possess some kind of supra-mundane *cittas* and can be contacted is also found in the teachings of one of the most influential Thammayut figures: Achan Man Bhūridatta (1871–1949). Achan Man Bhūridatta or Luang Pu Man was the founder of the modern Thai forest tradition and is today widely revered as an *arahant*. His students include Achan Waen Sucinno (1888–1985), Achan Maha Boowa Ñāṇasampanno (1913–2011), Achan Cha Subhaddo (1918–92), Achan Fan Acaro (1898–1977), Achan Thet Thetrangsi (1902–94), Achan Lee Dhammadharo (1907–61) and Achan Wiriyang Sirindharo (1920–) who themselves became well known and widely venerated Buddhist teachers.

Within Achan Man's tradition, there is a belief that past Buddhas and *arahants* are not completely extinguished after they die, but still exist as 'purified minds' and can assume conventional forms. The account is taken from Achan Maha Boowa's biography of Achan Man. Achan Maha Boowa began composing Achan Man's biography in 1969, 20 years after Achan Man's death. It was published in a weekly magazine, *Si Sapda*, from 1969 to 1971. The following is my translation of the 1971 edition of the biography published by Mahamakut Buddhist University.

According to Achan Maha Boowa, shortly after Achan Man attained *nibbāna* in the Chiang Dao cave in Chiang Mai, Achan Man was visited by past Buddhas and *arahants*. Achan Man asked the Buddha how they could appear resembling the human form when they had already attained *anupādisesa nibbāna* (*nibbāna* without the remainder of the five aggregates). The Buddha explained that Achan Man had indeed seen the real Buddhas and *arahants*, but his vision was a manifestation of conventional forms. The Buddhas and *arahants* ultimately exist as purified minds:

What is the real *Tathāgata*? It is the purity of the mind that you have already seen. The *Tathāgata*, who has come in this body, has come only in the conventional [*sammuti*] form [...] If the other side [i.e. Achan Man] has purity of mind, but still possesses the conventional body, the *anupādisesa nibbāna* side [i.e. the Buddha] must manifest the conventional to him. That is, they must come in the conventional form, which is a temporary tool. If both sides were *anupādisesa nibbāna*, and having no conventional part remaining, then the *Tathāgata* would not need to manifest any conventionality. (Maha Boowa 1971: 144)⁹⁹

⁹⁹ พระตถาคตแท้คืออะไร คือความบริสุทธิ์แห่งใจที่เธอเห็นแล้วนั้นแล ที่พระตถาคตมาในร่างนี้ มาในร่างแห่งสมมุติต่างหาก [...] ถ้าอีกฝ่ายหนึ่งแม้มีความบริสุทธิ์ทางใจด้วยดีแล้ว แต่ยังคงร่างอันเป็นสามสมมุติอยู่ ฝ่ายอนุปาทิเสสนิพพาน ก็ต้องแสดงสมมุติตอบรับกัน คือต้องมาร่างสมมุติซึ่งเป็นเครื่องใช้ชั่วคราวได้ ถ้าต่างฝ่ายต่างเป็นฝ่ายอนุปาทิเสสนิพพานด้วยกันแล้วไม่มีส่วนสมมุติเหลืออยู่ ตถาคตก็ไม่มีสมมุติอันใดมาแสดงเพื่ออะไรอีก.

When required to contact the conventional, the liberated [*vimutti*] must, for appropriateness, manifest itself separately in the conventional way. If among the completely liberated, for example a purified mind knowing and seeing another purified mind, it is merely knowing and seeing. There is no manifestation involved. But when [you, i.e. Achan Man] wish to know the characteristics and features of purity, [the *Tathāgata*] must bring in the conventional to help manifest the liberated. This enables [you] to know by way of general conventional signs that the liberated has the characteristics of being void of all mental images [*nimittas*], has an individual brightness and is more peaceful than anything. (Maha Boowa 1971: 144–145)¹⁰⁰

Achan Maha Boowa (1971: 145) adds that whether or not the Buddhas and *arahants* appeared to Achan Man, Achan Man has always understood the Trip Gems as purity without conventionality, and that this understanding coincides with the saying ‘Whoever sees the Dhamma, sees me, the *Tathāgata*’ (Ap 467). According to Achan Man, the ‘*vimutti*’ or ‘liberated’ minds of the Buddhas and *arahants* have ‘an individual brightness’, still in some way remain after they have entered *parinibbāna* and can assume a conventional form in order to come into contact with the awakened ones who still possess the five aggregates. The only way to have a vision of the Buddha is to achieve purity of mind.

¹⁰⁰ เมื่อยังต้องเกี่ยวกับสมมุติในเวลาต้องการอยู่ วิมุตติก็ต้องแยกแสดงออกโดยทางสมมุติเพื่อความเหมาะสม ถ้าเป็นวิมุตติส่วนๆเช่นจิตที่บริสุทธิ์รู้เห็นจิตที่บริสุทธิ์ด้วยกันก็เพียงรู้เห็นอยู่นั่น ไม่มีทางแสดงให้รู้อย่างอื่นไปได้ เมื่อต้องการทราบลักษณะอาการของความเป็นธรรมเป็นอย่างไรบ้าง ก็จำเป็นต้องนำสมมุติเข้ามาช่วยเสริมให้วิมุตติเด่นชัดขึ้นพอมีทางทราบกันได้ว่าวิมุตติมีลักษณะว่างเปล่าจากนิมิตทั้งปวง มีความสว่างไสวประจำตัว มีความสงบสุขเหนือสิ่งใดๆเป็นต้น.

Moreover, another influential Thammayut figure, namely the 19th Supreme Patriarch of Bangkok, Somdet Phra Yansangwon (Charoen Suvaddhano), the late abbot of Wat Bowonniwet (1912–2013), also held a similar understanding of *nibbāna*. In a collection of Dhamma sermons titled *Saeng song chai (Illuminating the heart)* published by Wat Bowonniwet in May 2007, the Supreme Patriarch recalls the above episode in Achan Man’s biography and states that this account has made him realize something that he has never realized before:

Somdet Phra Sammā Sambuddha Chao [the Buddha] and Phra Arahanta Chao [the *arahants*] still exist in the city of *nibbāna* and were not reborn into this and that as those ordinary beings who have passed from this world, who are controlled by the fruits of their defilements and *karma*, still do. But the great master [the Buddha] and Phra Arahanta Chao [the *arahants*] have no *karma* that causes them to be reborn. For they are far from defilements – birth and becoming has ended for them – and will no longer face the suffering of being reborn. (Yansangwon 2007: 17–18)¹⁰¹

Somdet Phra Yansangwon explains further that the Buddha and *arahants* that are in ‘the city of *nibbāna*’ are still aware of what goes on in the world and will appear to those who

¹⁰¹ สมเด็จพระบรมศาสดาสัมมาสัมพุทธเจ้าและพระอรหันตเจ้ายังอยู่ในเมืองพระนิพพาน มิได้ไปเกิดเป็นอะไรต่อมิอะไรเช่นปุถุชน หันนั้นที่ละโลกไปแล้ว ที่มีผลแห่งกิเลสหรือผลแห่งกรรมควบคุมอยู่ [...] แต่สมเด็จพระบรมศาสดาทรงไม่มีกรรม และพระอรหันตเจ้าทั้งหลายไม่มีกรรม ที่จะส่งผลให้ต้องเวียนว่ายตายเกิดเพราะกิเลสไกลแล้วอย่างสิ้นเชิง ภพชาติจึงสิ้นแล้ว ไม่ต้องพบทุกข์ของการเกิดอีกต่อไป.

are ‘worthy’, i.e. Achan Man (Yansangwon 2007: 18). This understanding of *nibbāna* and the nature of past Buddhas and *arahants* are, therefore, neither unique to Luang Pho Niam, Luang Pho Nong and Luang Pho Sot nor confined to the Mahānikāya lineage. As I shall discuss below, the epithet of *nibbāna* as a ‘city’ is most likely derived from older sources as similar epithets of *nibbāna* as a place are found in a number of *borān kammaṭṭhāna* texts.

Other aspects of Sammā Arahaṃ meditation, such as the visions of the spheres associated with various attainments of the Buddhist path, the *sammā arahaṃ* mantra and the seven bodily bases as a path to the centre of the body, which are not present in Luang Pho Niam’s and Luang Pho Nong’s teachings, are common characteristics of the so-called *borān kammaṭṭhāna* tradition and found in many traditional meditation texts in mainland Southeast Asia and Sri Lanka.

2.4 Aspects of traditional Theravāda meditation practices in Sammā Arahaṃ meditation

Over the last 40 years, there has been a development in research on a certain meditation tradition found in Theravāda Buddhism that appears to be markedly different from the meditation found in the ‘rationalistic monolithic Theravāda presented in many secondary sources’ (Crosby 2000: 141). This tradition, which consists of the form of collections of meditation texts and practices currently found in Sri Lanka, Cambodia, Thailand and Laos with certain similar distinctive features, first became the subject of Western academic

studies through the publication of *The Yogāvacara's manual of Indian mysticism* by T.W. Rhys Davids, and then, from the 1970s to the 1990s, a series of publications by François Bizot focusing on traditional Cambodian Buddhism.¹⁰² There is as yet no general consensus among scholars of Buddhism as to the name, definition and scope of these practices and beliefs, or even whether it is possible to distinguish them as a single separate tradition as opposed to simply a variety of 'old' traditions.

Recent publications by Kate Crosby, Andrew Skilton and Amal Gunasena (2012), Crosby (2013), Skilton and Phibul Choempolpaisal (2014 and 2015) refer to this meditation tradition as '*borān yogāvacara kammaṭṭhāna*' or '*borān kammaṭṭhāna*'. This *borān kammaṭṭhāna* tradition, which, according to Crosby's (2013: ix) findings, can be traced as far back as the sixteenth century, was widespread in the Theravāda region at the beginning of the modern era and practised at court, among the monastic hierarchy and in rural contexts, but was marginalized during the nineteenth- and twentieth-century reforms.

The phrase *borān kammaṭṭhāna*, 'traditional/ancient/old meditation', is derived from the Thai/Khmer word *borān* 'old/traditional' and the Pāli word *kammaṭṭhāna*, which is a standard term for 'meditation' in Theravāda Buddhism. Although the word *borān* is written the same way as the Pāli word *purāṇa*, it is not used with the same connotations (Crosby 2013: 155). A Thai compilation of texts of this tradition, *Phuttharangsi thritsadiyan book*

¹⁰² For example, Bizot (1976, 1988 and 1992).

of *samatha and vipassanā meditation of the four reigns* (Chai Yasothonrat anthology),¹⁰³ whose details I shall discuss below, also uses another similar phrase, ‘*kammaṭṭhāna baeb borān/kao*’ or traditional/old form of meditation (see Chai 1935: 2). It should be noted, however, that *borān kammaṭṭhāna* appears to be an anglicized version of the phrase, as according to the correct syntax in Thai and Khmer the expression should be ‘*kammaṭṭhāna borān*’. The Pāli word *yogāvacara*, on the other hand, means ‘practitioner of spiritual discipline’, and is derived from the first text of this tradition to be published in the West, the *Yogāvacara’s manual*, a Sinhalese-Pāli meditation manual found in Bambaragalavihāra, near Kandy, Sri Lanka, in 1893. It was edited and published in 1896 by T.W. Rhys Davids, and translated as *Manual of a mystic* by F.L. Woodward in 1916. The term is also found in texts examined by Bizot. However, it should again be noted that there is nothing distinctive in this usage as the term is widespread throughout the Visuddhimagga and Pāli commentaries.

The *Yogāvacara’s manual* was published in isolation at the time when Western scholarship did not possess enough understanding of the tradition to adequately interpret its practices. However, after Bizot’s groundbreaking textual and anthropological research into the living tradition in Cambodia beginning with *Le figuier à cinq branches* in 1976, a clearer picture of the tradition and its practices began to emerge. His works were supplemented by the research of his francophone colleagues such as Catherine Becchetti, Oskar von Hinüber,

¹⁰³ หนังสือพุทธรังษีอภิชิตญาณ ว่าด้วยสมณะและวิปัสสนากัมมัฏฐานสี่ยุค. It is a compilation of seven collections of meditation manuscripts obtained by Phra Upāli Khunupamachan (Chan Siricando) and Phra Mahājotipaṇṇo (Chai Yasothonrat) from Ubon Ratchathani, Lopburi, Ayutthaya and Bangkok.

François Lagirarde, Olivier de Bernon etc., working mainly on Cambodian sources.¹⁰⁴ These were summarized in English by several scholars, notably Lance Cousins (1997), Ian Harris (2005) and in Kate Crosby's 'Tantric Theravāda: A bibliographic essay on the writings of François Bizot and others on the Yogāvacara tradition', published in 2000.

The first publications in English following F.L. Woodward's (1916) *Manual of a mystic* are two articles by Donald Swearer (1995a and 1995b) and Mettanando's PhD thesis (1998), which provide translations and commentaries on several northern and central Thai and Laotian *borān kammaṭṭhāna* texts. As mentioned above, Mettanando's thesis is of particular importance as it introduces the Chai Yasothonrat anthology or *Phuttharangsi thritsadiyan book of samatha and vipassanā meditation of the four reigns* and the meditation system of Saṅgharāja Suk Kai Thuean (1733–1822) to Western scholarship. The Chai Yasothonrat anthology is by far the largest collection of *borān kammaṭṭhāna* texts to be published and consists of seven collections of meditation manuscripts obtained by Phra Upāli Khunupamachan (Chan Siricando) and Phra Mahājotipaṇṇo (Chai Yasothonrat) from Ubon Ratchathani, Lopburi, Ayutthaya and Bangkok, namely:

1. Vientiane meditation manuals composed by Supreme Patriarch
Sutthisomphrammanachan 12 Kawi, Somdet Phra Mahawichaithat
Rajamahamuni and Phra Mahatheraphutrangsi Bawonmuniyan
2. Meditation manuals from Wat Pradusongtham, Ayutthaya

¹⁰⁴ See, for example, Becchetti (1991), Bizot and von Hinüber (1994), Bizot and Lagirarde (1996), and de Bernon (2000).

3. Thonburi and Bangkok period meditation manuals composed by Supreme Patriarch Suk Kai Thuean and Supreme Patriarch Don, Wat Mahathat

The book is extremely important as it provides evidence of *borān kammaṭṭhāna* being practised and taught by the Thai and Laotian monastic establishments prior to the nineteenth-century reforms. Also in this anthology is a collection of eighteenth-century meditation manuals from Wat Pradusongtham, Ayutthaya (Chai 1935: 267–308 and 319–373), which I shall discuss below as one of the confirmed sources of Sammā Arahāṃ meditation. Wat Pradusongtham’s and Saṅgharāja Suk Kai Thuean’s systems are among the few living *borān kammaṭṭhāna* systems still being practised and taught at Wat Pradusongtham, Ayutthaya, and Wat Ratchasittharam, Thonburi, respectively. The Suk Kai Thuean system (also known as Kammathan Matchima Baep Lamdap) has since received a number of academic studies: for example, Newell’s PhD thesis (2008), Patrick Ong’s MA thesis (2011)¹⁰⁵ and two recent articles by Skilton and Choompolpaisal (2014 and 2015).

In 2015, the Thammayut *nikāya* reprinted the Chai Yasothonrat anthology on the occasion of the nineteenth Saṅgharāja Somdet Phra Yansangwon’s royal cremation (Thammayuttika 2015). The book is titled *Traditional/Old meditation manuals*.¹⁰⁶ Its content is exactly the same as the Chai Yasothonrat’s anthology but the editor, Thammayut *nikāya*, rearranged the order of the manuscripts and added another meditation manual titled

¹⁰⁵ Ong’s thesis has been published as *The Supreme Patriarch and his walking stick: The meditation legacy of Suk Kaithuean and its implications for Theravada Buddhism in Thailand* (2013).

¹⁰⁶ ตํารากรรณฐานโบราณ.

*Mūlakammaṭṭhāna Rom*¹⁰⁷ from Wat Methang, Chiangmai, in the north of Thailand. *Mūlakammaṭṭhāna Rom* was composed by Gandhiya Bhikkhu in 1875 but was based on an earlier manuscript by Khru Ba Kanchon Thera from Prae (1789–1878) who became the abbot of Wat Phra Sing in 1859 (Thammayuttika 2015: 143–160).

Another recent research on the Thai *borān kammaṭṭhāna* tradition is the PhD thesis of Kitchai Urkasame (2013), which provides translations and commentaries on several Thai palm leaf manuscripts in Tham scripts, including the *Dhammakāya* verses from Wat Pasak Noi, San Kampaeng, Chiang Mai. The *Dhammakāya* verses, which are identified by Bizot (1992: 293) as a *borān kammaṭṭhāna* (*yogāvacara*) text, are found throughout Thailand and Cambodia. Inscriptions of these verses dated 1549 were found inside the *cetiya* of Wat Suea, Phitsanulok, Thailand, and provide the earliest evidence of the *borān kammaṭṭhāna* tradition.

With regard to the Sri Lankan *borān kammaṭṭhāna* tradition, Crosby's recent research reveals a much wider existence of the tradition in Sri Lanka than has previously been documented. Two important Sri Lankan texts, which are believed to have been imported into Sri Lanka in 1750s from the royal house of Ayutthaya of Siam (Thailand), have been 'discovered'. Firstly, her article with Andrew Skilton and Amal Gunasena (2012) introduces '*Sutta on Understanding Death*', a Sinhalese meditation manual regarding the story of Princess Citta who must find gems hidden in a fig tree with five branches, a text whose Khmer and Lanna versions have been previously identified by Bizot and

¹⁰⁷ มูลกรรมฐานรวม.

Lagirarde.¹⁰⁸ Secondly, her book *Traditional Theravada meditation and its modern-era suppression*, published in 2013, introduces another Sri Lankan manual, *Amatākaravaṇṇanā*, a Pāli-Sinhala meditation manual, also believed to have been imported from Siam in the 1750s. It was held in the Nevill collection of the British Library and in the Museum für Indische Kunst in Berlin. The book also provides a systematic presentation of the evidence of *borān kammaṭṭhāna* in Southeast Asia and Sri Lanka and the various historical and cultural conditions leading to their suppression and marginalization in the modern era.

Myanmar is so far the only Theravāda Buddhist country in which no evidence of *borān kammaṭṭhāna* has previously been recorded. However, Skilton and Choompolpaisal (2015: 208) mention their forthcoming publication regarding a recent identification of a Mon tradition that may close this gap and provide evidence that *borān kammaṭṭhāna* was practised across the whole of the Theravāda region.

I shall now present Bizot's and Crosby's summaries of the common and distinctive characteristics and the various scholarly discussions regarding the tradition's history, practices and names. Bizot, in *La pureté par les mots* (Bizot and Lagirarde 1996), summarizes the tradition's practice as follows:

The *yogāvacara* must:

¹⁰⁸ See Bizot's *Le figuier à cinq branches* (1976) and Crosby, Skilton and Gunasena (2012: 178).

1. Memorise the stages of the embryonic development (with their alphabetic equivalents) which form the stages of his own formation;
2. Through these stages build himself another body using the organs and constituents that are the letters, i.e. the portions of the Dhamma;
3. Become conscious that this new body which he is going to produce outside of himself, first takes form within him, in his stomach at the level of the navel, taking the form of a Buddha the height of a thumb;
4. Pursue and achieve in this life the construction of this immortal vehicle because it leads the person who possesses it to Nibbāna, in that it takes the place of the spent physical form at the moment of death. (translated in Crosby 2000: 170)

La pureté par les mots is the work of 11 scholars and discusses the text *Saddavimāla* (*Purity by sound*), which has been widely circulated in Southeast Asia. The above summary is derived from various texts of the tradition, but in particular is based on *Le chemin de Laṅkā, textes bouddhiques du Cambodge* (Bizot 1992), which discusses a meditation text found in Cambodia, preserved in a mixture of Khmer, Pāli and Thai whose title (*The Road to Lanka*) the work is named after (see Crosby 2000: 156). Despite the mention of Lanka, Bizot believes this text to be of Thai origin.

In her summary of Bizot and other scholars, Crosby further points out the distinctive features of this tradition (Crosby 2000: 141):

1. The creation of a Buddha within through the performance of a ritual by placing and recognising within one's body the qualities of the Buddha, which in turn become the Buddha. This Buddha then replaces the unenlightened, physical individual at death.
2. The use of sacred language, combined with microcosm to macrocosm identity. Sacred syllables or phrases are used to represent a large entity. Groups of syllables of a particular number represent other significant groups of the same number. This use of sacred language includes use of heart syllables (akin to Mahāyāna *dhāraṇī*), mantras and yantras.
3. Sacred language as the creative principle. The Dhamma arises out of the Pali alphabet and sacred syllables. This refers to formation of Dhamma in all senses of the term: in the sense of spiritual teaching, in the sense of the qualities of a Buddha, and also Dhamma in the sense of the material and living world.
4. The application of the substitution of items and the substituted item then being treated as the original.
5. Esoteric interpretations of words, objects and myths that otherwise have a standard exoteric meaning or purpose in Theravāda Buddhism
6. The necessity of initiation prior to the performance of a ritual or practice.

7. The application of the methodologies outlined above to both soteriological ends, i.e., the pursuit of Nibbāna, and worldly ends, such as healing, longevity, protection, invincibility and, potentially, the harming of others. (Crosby 2000: 141–142)

Another important characteristic identified by Crosby (2000: 142) and Harris (2005: 94) is the significance of Abhidhamma categories and the books of the Abhidhamma Piṭaka. An example of this is the northern Thai text ‘*Summary of the Seven Books of the Abhidhamma*’, translated by Swearer (1995), in which syllables symbolizing the seven books of the Abhidhamma are said to ‘create human beings’, ‘the body, bodily faculties and the mind’ and have astrological significance assigned to the days of the week (Swearer 1995: 337). Although not all characteristics mentioned above are present in Sammā Arahāṃ meditation, one particular aspect appears to be very similar, namely the practice of constructing another body within oneself in the form of a Buddha at the level of the navel, which leads the practitioner to *nibbāna*.

In *borān kammaṭṭhāna*, the practitioner takes one or several of 40 meditation subjects mentioned in the Visuddhimagga and aspects of the meditative path, all of which are to be seen as luminous sphere *nimittas*, and internalizes them by drawing them via the nostrils and down through the energy centres of the body to the level of the navel, to be deposited at the practitioner’s ‘womb’. According to Crosby (2013: 93), the visions of the *nimittas* vary in different *borān kammaṭṭhāna* texts, but are usually experienced as spheres of light

and may be marked by Pāli syllables. The practitioner, then, combines these *nimittas* in various possible permutations, i.e. by placing them in and around the body in different sequences and orders, and in doing so he/she is bringing each element of the Buddha into his/her body and creating a Buddha within (Crosby 2013: 15–16). Through the process of substitution, these *nimitta* light spheres and Pāli syllables can represent qualities, concepts, objects and aspects of meditation, the qualities of the substituted being retained in the substitute (Crosby 2013: 93). This process is, of course, similar to the basic level of Sammā Arahaṃ meditation, in which a *nimitta* of a crystal sphere is moved along the seven bodily bases from the nostril to two finger widths above the navel. The idea of the Buddha within is also similar to the vision of *dhammakāya* within the practitioner’s inner minds and bodies.

The sphere *nimittas* and the vision of the Buddha appearing at the navel have been identified in several *borān kammaṭṭhāna* texts. For example, Bizot (1992: 211–224; summarized in Crosby 2000: 158), translating the Cambodian text *The Road to Lanka* (*Phlūv Braḥ Dhamma Lanḁā*), mentions the ‘sphere of the mind’ (*tuon citta*), which the practitioner sees in the centre of the navel. Later in the same text, the practitioner sees the Buddha in his navel, ‘radiating six colours’, and within the Buddha, the Dhamma and the ‘sphere of the Saṅgha’ (1992: 211–224; Crosby 2000: 159).

Another important example of this is the mention of the attainment of ‘*Buddho* sphere’ in Achan Maha Boowa’s biography of Achan Man Bhūridatta (1871–1949), the founder of the modern Thai forest tradition. In a conversation with the hill tribes of Chiang Mai, Achan

Man describes the ‘*Buddho* sphere’, a treasure of the Buddha to be found within one’s body, which enables one to gain knowledge of all three worlds. The following is my translation:

‘*Buddho*’ is a glass sphere that is precious in the three realms. It is a sphere of cleverness, knowing all in the three worlds [...] The Venerable [sphere] is very bright, brighter than 100 and 1,000 suns. For the sun cannot illuminate heaven and hell to be seen, but the ‘*Buddho* sphere’ can illuminate all [...] ‘*Buddho*’ is a bright glass sphere of numerous and uncountable colours. ‘*Buddho*’ is the splendid treasure of the Buddha. ‘*Buddho*’ is a bright body of knowledge, and not material. (Maha Boowa 1971: 166–167)¹⁰⁹

Achan Man, then, instructs the hill people to practise walking and sitting meditation, reciting the word ‘*Buddho*’ and keeping their minds within their bodies in order to find this sphere (Maha Boowa 1971: 167). These descriptions of the ‘*Buddho*’ sphere as ‘a bright glass sphere of numerous and uncountable colours’, ‘precious in the three realms’ and ‘the splendid treasure of the Buddha’, to be found within the body of the practitioner, indicate an aspect of *borān kammaṭṭhāna* in Achan Man’s teachings. The usage of the Thai honorific ‘*Than*’, which can be translated as ‘Venerable’, to designate the ‘*Buddho*’ sphere is also a characteristic of *borān kammaṭṭhāna*. As I shall discuss below, in Saṅgharāja Suk

¹⁰⁹ พุทโธเป็นดวงแก้วอันประเสริฐเลิศโลกในไตรภพเป็นดวงฉลาดรอบรู้ทั่วไตรโลกธาตุ [...] ทานสว่างมาก ยิ่งกว่าพระอาทิตย์ตั้งร้อยดวงพันดวง เพราะอาทิตย์ไม่สามารถส่องเห็นนรก-สวรรค์ได้ แต่ดวงพุทโธสามารถส่องเห็นหมด [...] พุทโธเป็นดวงแก้วสว่างไสวและมีหลายสีจนนับไม่ได้ พุทโธนี้เป็นสมบัติอันวิเศษของพระพุทธเจ้า พุทโธเป็นองค์แห่งความรู้ความสว่างไสวไม่เป็นวัตถุ.

Kai Thuean's meditation, the honorifics '*Phra*' (Honourable) and '*Chao*' (Majesty) apply not only to persons but also to meditation subjects, which are to be seen as light spheres in the body as well. In Saṅgharāja Suk's tradition, the honorifics indicate these spheres as 'a living presence of an exalted status that can be experienced' (Skilton and Choompolpaisal 2014: 93).

Crosby's characteristics of taking syllables of a particular number to represent other significant groups of the same number and the practice of substitution of items are also noted by McDaniel (2011: 103–4), who identified these practices as involving 'manipulating letters, sounds and movements (like the names of the Buddhas of the past, the days of the week, the names of the years, the parts of the body and the five *khandhas*) in an algebraic logic to achieve desired ends. These names, letters, sounds and so on are all possible Xs and Ys that can be shifted around and used to replace unknowns. Knowing when and where these primary numbers can be used to replace unknowns is one of the powers of the monk or lay ritualists. For example, in Cambodian *borān kammaṭṭhāna* texts, syllables of the mantra '*namo buddhāya*', which in Pāli means 'praise the Buddha', are identified with the names of past and future Buddhas, various bodily bases, the virtues of mother and father, and different colours of light (Crosby 2000: 158). A similar equation can also be found in Thailand, in which '*namo buddhāya*' is used to evoke past and future Buddhas, the five aggregates, the five elements etc. *Na* refers to the Buddha Kakusandha, form and the water element; *mo* to the Buddha Konagamana, feelings and the earth element; *bu* to the Buddha Kassapa, perception and the fire element; *ddhā* to the Buddha Gotama, mental formations and the air element; and *ya* to the future Buddha Metteyya,

consciousness and the atmosphere. Moreover, the five syllables also correspond to different colours, parts of the body, eras of Indian time and letters of the Pāli alphabet. The syllables are sometimes depicted in pictorial form as the island of Lanka (McDaniel 2011: 104).

Despite the widespread use of these practices in the Theravāda region at the beginning of the modern era, *borān kammaṭṭhāna* has greatly declined since the colonial period. The causes, according to Crosby (2013: 10), were the separation of science and religion and the colonial removal of structures underlying the technologies of transformation that informed *borān kammaṭṭhāna*. These traditional technologies, such as Indic Ayurvedic obstetrics, group theory mathematics, generative grammar and alchemy, which were a part of healing, ritual and meditation practices associated with the traditional role of Buddhist monks, were dismissed, discarded and/or suppressed in Southeast Asia and Sri Lanka from the beginning of the colonial period, and relegated to the spheres of ‘magic’ and ‘superstition’ as mainstream Buddhism was increasingly defined as ‘an other-worldly and rational/scientific religion’ (Crosby 2013: 54).

In Sri Lanka, the *borān kammaṭṭhāna* tradition, which was brought from Ayutthaya to the Kandyan court by the missions of the 1750s to revive the *saṅgha*, seems to have died out by the end of the nineteenth century, and when the meditation manual associated with this mission was discovered by Hugh Nevill, it had already fallen into disuse (Crosby 2013: 106–7). In Cambodia, a country that was once the centre of *borān kammaṭṭhāna* with lineages extending back possibly to even earlier than the sixteenth century, during the Pol Pot regime, the tradition seemed to have been on the verge of extinction as most of the

country's 65,000 monks disappeared, defrocked, disrobed and murdered by the Khmer Rouge (Harris 2013: 174 note 15). Crosby (2013: 103–4) observes that a teacher of this tradition, Venerable Phong Vorn of Wat Damrei Sar, north-east of Phnom Penh, who died in 2002, concerned lest his meditation tradition should die out, asked an experienced female disciple to teach it, which went against Cambodian custom. *Borān kammaṭṭhāna*, however, was revived for a brief period during the 1990s, but struggled to sustain itself because of the lack of experienced practitioners and those who could understand and master its texts (Crosby 2013: 104). In Thailand, one of the oldest surviving traditional meditations, the system of Saṅgharāja Suk Kai Thuean (1733–1822), which was made the standard practice at the 1821 Council (*saṅghāyanā*) of Meditation Practice during the reign of King Rama II (1809–1824), is today practised and taught only in one temple, Wat Ratchasittaram.¹¹⁰ Luang Pho Wira Ṭhānavīro (Phra Khru Sitthisangwon), the current lineage holder at Wat Ratchasittaram, bears the sole responsibility for preserving and passing on the tradition.

However, despite their marginalization, some *borān kammaṭṭhāna* methods survived and practices that are derived from and/or influenced by *borān kammaṭṭhāna* are still widely performed today. For example, McDaniel (2011: 104) links the practices and beliefs found in *borān kammaṭṭhāna* texts to one of the most popular chants in Thailand, the *Jinapañjaragāthā*. The *Jinapañjaragāthā* (Thai: *Khatha Chinabanchon*) or *The Verses on the Victor's Armour*, whose popularization is attributed to Somdet To of Wat Rakhang, Bangkok, is a chanting and protective text composed in Pāli. Its date and author are unknown. This text evokes past Buddhas and *arahants* to dwell at various places of the

¹¹⁰ For more information regarding the rehearsal see Wira Ṭhānavīro (2012: 408).

body to offer protection: 28 Buddhas are evoked on the head of the reciter; the Dhamma in the eyes; the *arahants*, *suttas* and *parittas* in/on various other parts of the body. Today, this text, along with other famous chants such as the *Jayamaṅgalagāthā*, is distributed in temples all over Thailand in the form of pamphlets, leaflets, CDs and DVDs. It has also been printed on pillowcases and sold in shopping malls. The identification of the Buddhas, etc. with various bases of the body conforms to characteristics of the *borān kammaṭṭhāna* tradition. Moreover, the *Jinapañjaragāthā* also suggests the practices of tattooing and meditation. It is supposed to be chanted on Thursdays and is used to infuse amulets with power.

Borān kammaṭṭhāna and its related beliefs and practices in the understanding of the body, the internalization of stages of meditation in the practitioner's navel through the various energy channels, the use of sacred languages, initiation rituals, transmission in closed teacher-pupil lineages, and 'a mythology that personifies forces of good and evil' show similarities with Indo-Tibetan tantra (Crosby 2013: 4). This led Bizot, Crosby, Swearer, Finot, Ray, Lagirarde and Strong in some publications to refer to a range of practices related to *borān kammaṭṭhāna* as 'tantric Theravāda' (see McDaniel 2012: 103 and Crosby 2000: 141–42). Cousins, in his 1997 article, terms this tradition 'Esoteric Southern Buddhism'.

Some scholars, however, question the use of the terms 'tantric' and 'esoteric' to describe the tradition. Harris (2005: 94), discussing the works of Bizot, finds the term 'tantric Theravāda' problematic as, according to him, there is no independent evidence to support

the theory of a syncretization between Theravāda and tantric ideas. He argues that the terminology and doctrinal background of all textual records appear to be entirely Theravāda and that the cycle of divinities characteristics of the Hindu and Buddhist tantras are absent. Crosby (2013: 4) observes similarly that Vajrayāna Buddhist concepts, doctrines and practices, such as *tāntrikas*, deity yoga, Madhyamaka, Yogācāra and Tathāgatagarbha, are not found in *borān kammaṭṭhāna*, but only the concepts, doctrines and practices of Theravāda Abhidhamma, Visuddhimagga and commentarial texts are found. McDaniel (2012: 100–7) argues that some texts and practices related to this tradition, such as the *Jinapañjaragāthā*, are still commonly found today and are neither secretive nor reserved for initiates or the ordained. Thus to call this tradition ‘tantric’ and ‘esoteric’ can be misleading because it suggests that these practices and texts are not mainstream, are hidden, difficult to understand and only practised by ritual experts. Moreover, the term ‘tantra’ is associated with certain areas and traditions of northern Buddhism, such as Kashmir, Tibet and Shingon Buddhism in Japan etc., and it is also an umbrella term that covers a wide range of diverse Hindu and Buddhist practices (McDaniel 2012: 106).

McDaniel (2012: 107) also questions the use of the term *yogāvacara* as it is a vague and broad term, and although used in Cambodian sources, it is generally not found in Thai texts or stated explicitly by Thai practitioners. As I have already noted, *yogāvacara* is a Pāli term found throughout the Visuddhimagga and Pāli commentaries. It is used to refer to the practitioner who is devoted to mental training. Likewise, *borān kammaṭṭhāna* also consists of broad terms referring to traditional/old meditation, terms that other old meditation

traditions not belonging to this tradition would also call themselves. For example, the meditation method of Somdet Phra Wannarat (Thap Buddhasiri) (1806–1891) of Wat Sommanat, Bangkok, whose details I shall discuss below, could be called a traditional/old meditation method, but it does not conform to the characteristics of *borān kammaṭṭhāna* as outlined by Bizot and others. The Chai Yasothornrat anthology describes itself as a collection of traditional meditation texts (*kammaṭṭhāna baeb borān*) (Chai 1935: 2), but among this collection are the teachings of a Thammayut monk, Phra Upāli Khunupamachan (Chan Siricando). Although Phra Upāli took an interest in collecting and preserving traditional meditation manuals, many of his teachings, including ones presented in this anthology, contain very little *borān kammaṭṭhāna* features. It is clear that the anthology neither views these teachings as part of a separate tradition from the rest of the anthology nor sees the rest of the anthology as an integrated coherent system or tradition, but a diverse range of practices. Moreover, many texts and practices of this tradition do not see themselves as constituting a single tradition separate from the Pāli or Theravāda tradition more generally. It is still unclear whether the practitioners of these different methods would accept the other practices grouped under the umbrella term *borān kammaṭṭhāna* as belonging to the same tradition. However, despite these limitations, I shall refer to this group of meditation texts and practices with characteristics similar to the ones described above as *borān kammaṭṭhāna*.

Therefore, certain elements that make up Sammā Arahaṃ meditation are not at all unique, but rather are common characteristics found in many important meditation texts and practised and taught by influential figures in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia prior to Luang

Pho Sot. I have identified four main features of *borān kammaṭṭhāna* that are related to Sammā Arahaṃ meditation. These are: 1) visions of the bright spheres, which are associated with various attainments of the Buddhist path; 2) the location of bodily bases for the practice of visualization; 3) the attainment of spiritual bodies and *dhamma* body (*dhammakāya*); and 4) the epithet of *nibbāna* as a place. Although features 3 and 4 are not listed by Bizot and Crosby as common features of *borān kammaṭṭhāna*, they have been found in a number of important *borān kammaṭṭhāna* texts.

However, there are also many aspects of *borān kammaṭṭhāna* that are absent or significantly downplayed in Sammā Arahaṃ meditation: for example, aspects such as the use of sacred syllables, combined with microcosm to macrocosm identity; the application of the substitution of items and the substituted items then being treated as the original; the esoteric interpretations of words, objects and myths; the references to Abhidhamma categories; and initiation rituals. These are absent in Sammā Arahaṃ meditation. The usage of mantras and the association of meditation practice with embryonic development are downplayed in Sammā Arahaṃ meditation. The only ‘mantra’ used in Sammā Arahaṃ meditation is the words *sammā arahaṃ*. However, unlike the treatment of the syllables ‘*namo buddhāya*’ as described above, Luang Pho Sot neither treats *sammā arahaṃ* as sacred syllables nor identifies them with other significant groups of the same number. His understanding of these words is that they solely represent the qualities of the Buddha and their recitation the practice of recollection of the Buddha. They are not written down in ancient scripts, drawn in *yantras*, visualized nor associated with other concepts except the wisdom and purity of the Buddha.

Moreover, the spheres and inner bodies in Sammā Arahaṃ meditation are not described as *nimittas*, but actual visual manifestations of the attainments of the Buddhist path. Luang Pho Sot sees them as manifesting simultaneously when each of the attainments is achieved. They are thus the same entity as the attainments themselves, and not their substitutes or representations. Embryonic development is briefly and occasionally mentioned with regard to the seven bodily bases. Luang Pho Sot describes the path to the centre of the body as corresponding to an individual following the seven bases and descending into the mother's womb before being reborn at conception. However, he does not provide any further connection between embryonic development and Sammā Arahaṃ meditation. Sammā Arahaṃ meditation is also not an esoteric meditation tradition. Luang Pho Sot made the technique available to the public. Even the higher levels have been made available through the publication of the *Abbot's handbook*. There are no initiation rituals or transmission in closed teacher-pupil lineages involved in its practice. As I shall mention below, one of the teachers recognized by Wat Paknam, Phra Khru Phawana Sitthikhun (Bancha Sirivijjaya), the abbot of Wat Mongkhonthep, Chachoengsao, claims that his training of Sammā Arahaṃ meditation has been completely self-taught.

I shall now discuss two *borān kammaṭṭhāna* meditation manuals from the late Ayutthaya and early Bangkok periods (eighteenth to nineteenth centuries) and two living meditation traditions connected to these manuals whose practices have been confirmed to have influenced Luang Pho Sot's development of Sammā Arahaṃ meditation:

1. Eighteenth- to nineteenth-century meditation manual composed by Saṅgharāja Suk Kai Thuean and the living tradition at Wat Ratchasittharam, Thonburi
2. Eighteenth-century meditation manual and the living tradition at Wat Pradusongtham, Ayutthaya

As mentioned above, the meditation system of Saṅgharāja Suk Kai Thuean has been confirmed by the research of Newell (2008) to be one of the sources of Sammā Arahaṃ meditation. With regard to Wat Pradusongtham, this research confirms that Luang Pho Sot took up residence and studied meditation under a renowned lay meditation master, Achan Chap Suwan (1883–1958), at Wat Pradusongtham, Ayutthaya, prior to developing Sammā Arahaṃ meditation.

2.4.1 Saṅgharāja Suk Kai Thuean’s meditation manual and living tradition at Wat Ratchasittharam, Thonburi

The first *borān kammaṭṭhāna* system to be confirmed as one of the sources of Sammā Arahaṃ meditation is ‘Kammathan Matchima Baep Lamdap’¹¹¹ of Saṅgharāja Suk Kai Thuean (1733–1822). Saṅgharāja Suk Kai Thuean or ‘Somdet Suk’ was born during the reign of King Boromakot of Ayutthaya (1733–1758) and died during the reign of King Rama II (1809–1824). His meditation method is believed to have been the predominant form of meditation in Bangkok during the reigns of Rama I, II, III and IV as Saṅgharāja

¹¹¹ กรรมฐานมัชฌิมาแบบลำดับ translated as ‘the progressive training of the mind in the middle way employing meditation subjects’ (Skilton and Choempolpaisal 2014: 90).

Suk taught meditation to all four kings of the House of Chakri (Wira 2012: 27).¹¹² Saṅgharāja Suk was abbot of Wat Thahoi, a temple belonging to the forest tradition, in Ayutthaya. After King Taksin of Thonburi (r. 1767–82) was deposed, Saṅgharāja Suk, who was believed to be a non-returner (*anāgāmi*), was invited by Rama I to the new city of Bangkok to reside at Wat Phlap as the head of meditation (Wira 2012: 27 and 74).¹¹³ Wat Ratchasittharam was later built by Rama I next to Wat Phlap. The two temples then merged to become a single temple and has been known as Wat Ratchasittharam up to the present day. Saṅgharāja Suk was appointed the Supreme Patriarch in 1819 by order of Rama II, a position he held for two years. A renowned teacher and meditation master, Saṅgharāja Suk headed the council that conducted the purification (*saṅghāyanā*) of meditation practices in 1821. The council, whose members comprised mostly Saṅgharāja Suk’s students, was set up by order of King Rama II to examine meditation practitioners throughout Bangkok (Wira 2012: 408). According to Saṅgharāja Suk’s biography, it was his Kammathan Matchima Baep Lamdap system that was made the standard practice at the council (Wira 2012: 408–10). The second, third, fifth, sixth and seventh Supreme Patriarchs of the Bangkok era, and the famous Somdet To Brahmaramsī of Wat Rakhang (1788–1872), were also among Saṅgharāja Suk’s meditation students (Wira 2012: 27). In addition to his reputation as a meditation master, Saṅgharāja Suk is also known for his amulets, of which he made two models: Phra Krueang Wat Phlap and Somdet Wat Phlap.

¹¹² For a biography of Saṅgharāja Suk see Wira Ṭhānavīro (2012), which can be downloaded from Wat Ratchasittharam’s website.

¹¹³ พระราชาคณะฝ่ายวิปัสสนาธุระ ‘Phra Rachakhana Fai Wipatsanathura’.

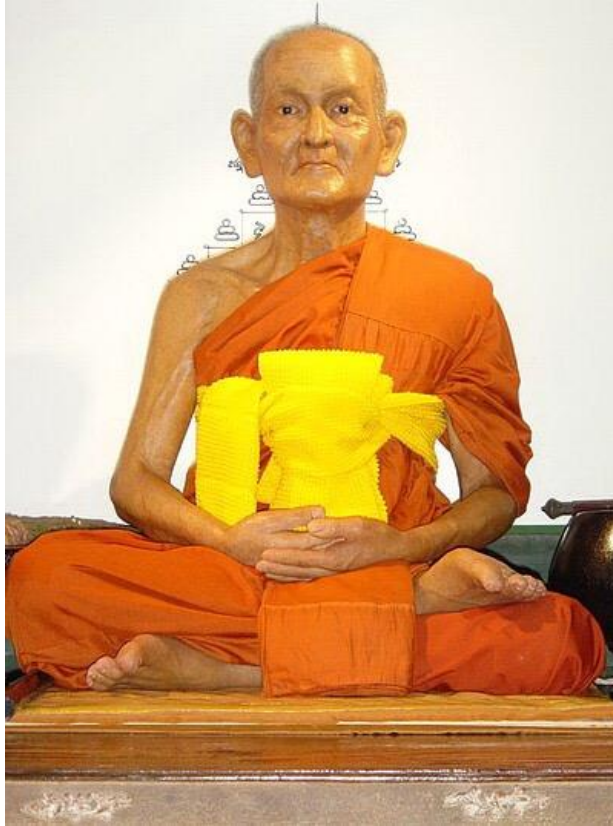


Figure 2.8: Image of Saṅgharāja Suk Kai Thuean at Wat Ratchasittharam (photograph taken by the author).

Saṅgharāja Suk’s meditation system is still practised today at Wat Ratchasittharam, Thonburi, and the living tradition is discussed in Newell (2008), Ong (2011), and Skilton and Choompolpaisal (2014 and 2015). The basic levels of this system consist of the recitation of mantras, the visualization of sphere *nimittas* along various bodily bases and the use of monastic devices such as the *luk sakots* to aid concentration. The *samatha* or calm meditation stage consists of 13 meditation subjects, the first four being the rooms of: 1) five delights or joys (*pīti*); 2) six pairs (*yugala*); 3) bodily and mental happiness (*kāyasukha* and *cittasukha*); and 4) mindfulness of breath (*ānāpānasati*).

The five delights section is discussed in detail in Skilton and Choompson (2014). This section consists of the practitioner experiencing the five kinds of delights both as bodily sensations and also to be seen as light spheres. The five delights, namely minor joy (*khuddhakā-pīti*), momentary joy (*khaṇikā-pīti*), showering joy (*okkantikā-pīti*), uplifting joy (*ubbegā-pīti*) and pervading joy (*pharaṇā-pīti*), and their equivalent light spheres are given the honorifics of ‘*Phra*’ and ‘*Chao*’. These last two terms, which can be translated as ‘honourable’ and ‘majesty’, indicate that they are to be experienced as ‘tangible’ and ‘living entities’ of ‘exalted status’ that are ‘to be honoured’ (Skilton and Choompson 2014: 93–4). Moreover, the light spheres in Saṅgharāja Suk’s system are also called ‘*dhamma* sphere’ (*duang tham*). Once the light spheres are invoked by the practitioner, they are moved around the body at various bodily bases between the nostril and the navel in specific patterns and sequences.

The *dhamma* sphere is, of course, a very important vision in Sammā Arahaṇa meditation. As mentioned above, the *dhamma* sphere, also called the *dhammānupassanā satipaṭṭhāna* sphere, indicates a visual manifestation of an attainment and is one of the most often used terms in Luang Pho Sot’s meditation teachings. Each inner body from the refined human to *dhammakāya arahatta* also has a *dhamma* sphere and is endowed with the qualities specific to that particular body and attainment. For example, the *dhamma* sphere of the human body appears when one achieves purity of body, speech and mind; the *dhamma* sphere of the *brahmā* body when one attains first, second, third and fourth *jhānas*; the *dhamma* sphere of *dhammakāya sotāpanna* when one abandons *sakkāyadiṭṭhi* (false view

of the individual), *vicikicchā* (doubt) and *sīlabbataparāmāsa* (adherence to rules and rituals) etc. As I shall argue below, the coining of the *dhammānupassanā satipaṭṭhāna* sphere is another example of Luang Pho Sot reinterpreting *borān kammaṭṭhāna* practices in terms of the four *satipaṭṭhānas*.

One of the devices employed at the conclusion of each of the three foundation levels is the *luk sakots*, balls made of lead that look like the pips of a fruit. *Luk sakots* are studded on a candle that is balanced on a T-shaped wooden object. The object is then placed on the mouth of an alms bowl. As the practitioner meditates, the candle is lit and the *luk sakots* drop into the alms bowl with a loud noise. The sound is aimed at training the practitioner's mind to remain in concentration and not to be distracted by loud noises, and also serves as an auditory signal to alert the practitioner to set the mind at a different point along the torso (Ong 2011: 101). Different-coloured light spheres are experienced at different stages, and at the end of each session the practitioner must discuss these experiences with the meditation teacher. To progress to higher levels the practitioner must experience the correct visions. The first *jhāna* is achieved at the completion of the seventh stage, in which the practitioner contemplates the repulsiveness of the body. Deeper levels of concentration culminating in the four formless absorptions follow, and after thirteen levels of *samatha* meditation, the practitioner moves on to practise *vipassanā* meditation, of which there are nine levels. However, because of their esoteric nature, the higher levels of *samatha* and *vipassanā* meditation are not disclosed to the public.

As mentioned above, Mettanando (1998: 25–6) was the first scholar to introduce the Chai Yasothonrat anthology to an English language audience. In his analysis of Saṅgharāja Suk Kai Thuean’s meditation text in the anthology, he observes that the text is composed of three independent parts. The first part consists of instructions for the practice of calm and insight meditation, and the second is a description of the five kinds of joy (*pīti*) and their association with the five Buddhas of this aeon, different colours, the five elements and the mantra *namo buddhāya*. The third part of the text contains the description of the nine bodily bases and their application in meditation, healing and solving personal problems, and contains magical diagrams, drawings, mantras, puzzles and cryptic phrases (Mettanando 1998: 25–6). This part is the longest part of the text.

In her attempt to find the precursor of Sammā Arahaṃ meditation, Newell (2008: 209), following Mettanando, came across the Chai Yasothonrat anthology, and in her analysis of Saṅgharāja Suk’s text, she finds similarities between his system, the Sri Lankan *Yogāvacara’s manual* (Woodward 1916) and the characteristics of *borān kammaṭṭhāna*. Newell links this manuscript to Luang Pho Sot’s biographical note that at one point he had studied meditation at Wat Ratchasittharam and practised the visualization method until he was able to see a sphere at the centre of the diaphragm (Newell 2008: 82).

Newell (2008: 67), following Wat Luang Pho Sot’s biography, mentions eight temples and meditation masters whom Luang Pho Sot studied with. She goes on to cite Magness (2007: 5), who claims that at the ‘fifth centre’, Luang Pho Sot managed to achieve a vision of a bright sphere in his diaphragm and was elected to teach by his teacher (Newell 2008: 67).

Newell saw the list of eight temples and teachers in Wat Luang Pho Sot's biography and assumed that this fifth centre was Wat Ratchasittharam.

However, according to his autobiography, the fifth centre where Luang Pho Sot achieved a vision of the bright sphere is actually Wat Lakorntham, which is the fifth centre in the autobiography.¹¹⁴ For it is stated explicitly in the biography by Achan Wira Gaṇuttamo, the late deputy abbot and head of meditation at Wat Paknam, that Luang Pho Sot achieved this vision while he was studying with Achan Sing at Wat Lakorntham (*63 sermons* 1984: (45)). Moreover, the autobiography also mentions that he was elected to teach by not only one, but two of his meditation teachers. After Luang Pho Sot visited Wat Ratchasittharam, he went to study with Phra Khru Yanwirat (Po) of Wat Pho and Achan Sing Wat Lakhontham (*63 sermons* 1984 (3)) until they were both satisfied with his progress and invited him to become a meditation teacher of their traditions, but as he felt that he was not ready to teach, he declined their offers (*63 sermons* 1984: (3)).

According to Newell's comparison of Saṅgharāja Suk and Luang Pho Sot's systems, both systems make use of the *sammā arahaṃ* mantra and share the use of the vision of a sphere (Newell 2008: 256). *Sammā arahaṃ* are repeated in both the *pīti* and *ānāpānasati* sections and are also mentioned on page 215 in the Chai Yasothonrat anthology, towards the end of Saṅgharāja Suk's text. Moreover, the illustration of Saṅgharāja Suk's method also shows

¹¹⁴ As I mentioned above, the autobiography only lists five teachers and centres in chronological order, namely: 1) Luang Pho Nong, Wat Amphawan; 2) Luang Pho Niam, Wat Noi; 3) Achan Aium, Wat Ratchasittharam; 4) Phra Khru Yanwirat (Po), Wat Pho; and 5) Achan Sing, Wat Lakorntham (*63 Sermons* 1984: (3)).

a figure in meditation with the bodily bases, similar to the one utilized by Luang Pho Sot as described above. Newell shows two different illustrations of the bodily bases, one from Saṅgharāja Suk's system consisting of nine bases and the other from Luang Pho Sot's seven-base diagram, which show great similarities to the extent that it is clear that Luang Pho Sot may have borrowed the diagram of the bodily bases from the Chai Yasothonrat anthology (Newell 2008: 257). Her hypothesis was then confirmed when she went to Wat Ratchasittharam and was informed by Luang Pho Wira Ṭhānavīro (Phra Khru Sitthisangwon), the meditation instructor and lineage holder, that Luang Pho Sot had studied at the temple and adopted Saṅgharāja Suk's system.

In Saṅgharāja Suk's system, the bodily base diagrams are employed in several levels of *samatha* meditation. For example, in the fourth level, in which the practitioner performs mindfulness of breathing (*ānāpānasati*), the practitioner focuses on fixing the mind at nine specific bodily bases located along the breathing passage from the tip of the nose down to the navel. Awareness of these points is aimed at helping the practitioner mindfully to follow the breath as it moves in and out of the body while contacting these specific areas. As the practitioner's mind is fixed on each of the bodily bases, *nimittas* specific to each base arise (Skilton and Choompolpaisal 2015: 222). Identifying the correct *nimittas* at each location enables the practitioner to move on to the next stage.

I find this aspect of employing the bodily bases as contact points to observe the in- and outbreaths as the *nimitta* moves from the nose to the navel particularly similar to the preliminary level in Sammā Arahaṃ meditation. In Sammā Arahaṃ meditation, the usage

of the first to sixth bodily bases ends at the level of *parikamma nimitta* (preliminary sign), and the rest of its practice is focused on stopping still at the seventh base, two finger widths above the navel. The seventh base is where most of Sammā Arahaṃ's practice occur, whereas in Saṅgharāja Suk's system, the nine bases are used much more frequently at different levels, and applied to various purposes.

Apart from the goal of achieving mental concentration, in Saṅgharāja Suk's system the nine bodily bases, together with the five joys, mantras and *nimittas*, are also used in healing. The Chai Yasothonrat anthology (following Mettanando's translation) states that:

The meditator who has mastered both the technique of cultivation of inner peace (*samatha*) and insight meditation (*wipassanā*) can transfer a well-established visualized image which he has cultivated, or any member of the five joys (*pīti*) which he has well cultivated, or a visualized image of the relic of the Buddha (*ong-phra-thāt*) to one of the nine Bases and work according to the specific purposes, for warding off pain and curing diseases.

(Mettanando 1998: 90–91)

Ong (2011: 63) adds that in Saṅgharāja Suk's system, mental concentration is employed to shift or move the bases of the four elements inside the body to cure illnesses. The unclean wind or '*lom*' can be moved by the concentrated mind to one of the nine bodily bases to be expelled through exhalation or via the anus. This is also assisted through the use of *nimittas* and mantras.

The second part of Saṅgharāja Suk's text in Chai Yasothonrat's anthology contains another aspect of *borān kammaṭṭhāna*, namely groups of syllables of a particular number representing other significant groups of the same number (Crosby 2000: 141–142). The ubiquitous mantra *namo buddhāya* is again mentioned and linked not only to different colours, five elements, five Buddhas of this aeon and five animal symbols, but also to the five joys arising in meditation. The five joys are given the honorifics of 'Phra' and 'Chao' here and are translated as 'honourable majesty'. I have made some modifications to Mettanando's translation as follows:

The [honourable majesty] minor joy [*phra khuddhakā-pīti chao*] is the Lord [*Kakusandha*] Buddha whose symbol is a cock. Giving thrills to the body hair and head hair to stand on end, the earth element [*paṭhavī-dhātu*] of 21 attributes.

The [honourable majesty] momentary joy [*phra khaṇikā-pīti chao*] is the Lord [*Koṇāgamana*] Buddha whose symbol is a serpent, giving a glaring quality like of spark of a lighter, the fire element [*tejo-dhātu*] of six attributes.

The [honourable majesty showering] joy [*phra okkantikā-pīti chao*] is the Lord *Kassapa* Buddha whose symbol is a turtle, giving oscillating body movement, the water element [*āpo-dhātu*] of 12 attributes.

The [honourable majesty uplifting] joy [*phra ubbegā-pīti chao*] is the Lord *Gotama* Buddha whose symbol is a bull, giving a towering body, either to the front or to the back, the wind element [*vāyo-dhātu*] of seven attributes.

The [honourable majesty] pervading joy [*phra pharaṇā-pīti chao*] is the Lord *Metteyya* Buddha whose symbol is a lion king with an ability to create a tingling sensation over the skin surface, giving a towering body, either to the front or to the back, the [air] element [*ākāsa-dhātu*] of ten attributes.

(Mettanando 1998: 84–5)

The attributes of the five joys, 56 in total, correspond to the 56 syllables of the *iti pi so* formula. This Pāli formula, as mentioned above, is found throughout the Pāli canon and describes the qualities of the Buddha. This characteristic is, of course, not found in *Sammā Arahaṃ* meditation.

I shall now discuss two more aspects in Saṅgharāja Suk's tradition, which also influenced Luang Pho Sot's development of *Sammā Arahaṃ* meditation, namely the visions of one's inner bodies and the epithet of *nibbāna* as a place. In Saṅgharāja Suk's manual in the Chai Yasothornrat anthology (1935: 253), there are references to visions of 'one's own body decorated with a crown, a necklace and a breast chain'. Towards the end of Saṅgharāja Suk's text, two pages after the reference to the *sammā arahaṃ* mantra, it describes the practice of mindfulness of breathing, reciting of the mantra '*buddho*' and the attainments

of the five joys; then the text instructs the meditator to take the Buddha's qualities as a refuge and a vision of 'one's own body decorated with a crown, a necklace and a breast chain' will appear.¹¹⁵ The text does not state exactly where this vision is to appear, but its description bears a lot of similarities to the vision of the celestial or *deva* body, which appears around the meditator's body in Sammā Arahaṃ meditation. The crude and refined *deva* body is seen after the refined human body and prior to the crude *brahmā* body. The picture below is an illustration of the crude and refined *deva* bodies in Sammā Arahaṃ meditation (Saman: 2000: 272).



Figure 2.9: Illustration of the crude and refined *deva* bodies in Sammā Arahaṃ meditation (Saman 2000: 272).

¹¹⁵ ปราบกณเห็นรูปร่างตนเอง ทรงเครื่องมงกุฎสร้อยสังวาลย์.

Furthermore, the description of *nibbāna* as ‘the glass city’ is briefly mentioned in Saṅgharāja Suk’s biography. The biography, compiled and edited by Luang Pho Wira Ṭhānavīro (Phra Khru Sitthisangwon), the current and only lineage holder of the tradition, makes this reference at the end of the accounts of Saṅgharāja Suk’s two-year meditation training at Wat Rongchang, Ayutthaya, prior to his residency as the abbot of Wat Thahoi, Ayutthaya. The biography states that after Saṅgharāja Suk had mastered controlling and contemplating all the elements (*dhātus*) at Wat Rongchang, he was able to cultivate the path (*magga*) *dhamma* and fruit (*phala*) *dhamma* in order to reach ‘the glass/crystal city, the great eternal *nibbāna dhamma*’ (Wira 2012: 68).¹¹⁶ This epithet is not mentioned anywhere else in the biography nor in the Chai Yasothonrat anthology.

I visited Wat Ratchasittharam and conducted three interviews with Luang Pho Wira Ṭhānavīro (Phra Khru Sitthisangwon).¹¹⁷ Each time, I showed the references in the Chai Yasothonrat anthology and asked him to explain the meaning of the visions. The first two times, Luang Pho Wira merely confirmed that the passage refers to the vision of the meditator’s inner body.¹¹⁸ The third time, he explained further that, in Saṅgharāja Suk’s system, when the mind reaches pre-*jhāna* access concentration (*upacāra samadhi*), the practitioner’s inner body, or the body that is within the mind of the practitioner, will appear in front of him/her (Sitthisangwon 2019). The vision of the inner body appears as the manual states, ‘decorated with a crown, a necklace and a breast chain’, not surrounding the practitioner, as in Sammā Arahaṃ meditation, but facing the practitioner, like a mirror

¹¹⁶ เพื่อกิ่งเมืองแก้วอมตมหานิพพานธรรม.

¹¹⁷ 22 March 2014, 26 April 2018 and 10 July 2019.

¹¹⁸ ภายในกาย.

image. The first vision of one's inner body is usually achieved in the third stage, bodily and mental happiness (*kāyasukha* and *cittasukha*), and from this stage, more inner bodies are seen up to the highest level, the path of the *arahant* (*arahatta magga*). As the practitioner progresses to higher stages, he/she will see more refined inner bodies, each body appearing differently depending on the purity of the practitioner's mind (Sitthisangwon 2019). When asked whether Luang Pho Sot could have adopted the visions of the inner bodies in Sammā Arahaṃ meditation, he admitted that it was possible as Luang Pho Sot had reached the third and fourth levels in Saṅgharāja Suk's method. According to Luang Pho Wira, Luang Pho Sot had reached the fourth level of Saṅgharāja Suk's method, the mindfulness of breath (*ānāpānasati*), and did not complete the entire system before going off and developing his own meditation system (Sitthisangwon 2019). Sammā Arahaṃ meditation, according to him, resembles the first four levels of Saṅgharāja Suk's system but skips the intermediate levels and goes straight to the level of *dhammakāya* (Sitthisangwon 2019).

I asked him whether the vision of a translucent Buddha image, like *dhammakāya* in Sammā Arahaṃ meditation, exists in Saṅgharāja Suk's method. He stated that the vision of the Buddha in meditation exists in the higher levels, but it is not called *dhammakāya* and does not appear translucent (Sitthisangwon 2019). Saṅgharāja Suk's method also has the attainment of *dhammakāya* but interprets *dhammakāya* differently from Luang Pho Sot (Sitthisangwon 2019). Lastly, I showed Luang Pho Wira the reference to the glass city of *nibbāna* in Saṅgharāja Suk's biography and asked him to explain the meaning of this epithet. He said that this description of *nibbāna* is derived from older sources and that it is

the way ancient teachers used to describe it (Siththisangwon 2019). For both questions, due to the esoteric nature of the higher levels of meditation, Luang Pho Wira was unable to comment further.

From reading the above statement of Luang Pho Wira regarding Luang Pho Sot's training at Wat Ratchasittharam one can be misled into assuming that Luang Pho Sot had only a basic grounding in meditation prior to developing Sammā Arahaṃ meditation. However, as this dissertation has shown from Luang Pho Sot's autobiography, before visiting Wat Ratchasittharam, he had studied with Luang Pho Niam Dhammajoti, Wat Noi and Luang Pho Nong Indasuvanno, Wat Amphawan, Suphanburi province. After he visited Wat Ratchasittharam, he went to study with Phra Khru Yanwirat (Po) of Wat Pho and Achan Sing Wat Lakhontham, until they were both satisfied with his progress and invited him to become a meditation teacher of their traditions (*63 sermons* 1984 (3)). There is no record of Phra Khru Yanwirat Po's meditation system. However, Achan Sing's meditation consists of visualizing a light sphere in the abdomen, a common characteristic of the so-called *borān kammaṭṭhāna* texts. This is mentioned in Achan Wira Gaṇuttamo's biography of Luang Pho Sot (*63 sermons* 1984: (45)). Somdet Pun's biography also mentions Luang Pho Sot studying the Visuddhimagga in preparation for meditation practice (*63 sermons* 1984: (10)). Thus, according to these records, it seems clear that Luang Pho Sot had much more than a basic training in various meditation methods prior to developing Sammā Arahaṃ meditation. Much of his training at Wat Ratchasittharam was perhaps a reiteration and a confirmation of what he had already practised and achieved.

Sammā Arahaṃ meditation	Saṅgharāja Suk's system
Seven bodily bases	Nine bodily bases
Visions of spheres as a visual manifestation of various attainments; the term <i>dhamma</i> sphere	Visions of spheres of various meditation subjects to be experienced as tangible and living entities of exalted status; the term <i>dhamma</i> sphere
<i>Sammā arahaṃ</i> mantra	<i>Sammā arahaṃ</i> mantra
Visions of inner <i>deva</i> bodies with a crown, a necklace and a breast chain surrounding the practitioner's body	Visions of inner bodies with a crown, a necklace and a breast chain in front of the practitioner's body
No <i>luk sakots</i>	Employment of <i>luk sakots</i>
The practice of <i>ānāpānasati</i> ; calming of bodily, verbal and mental activities; the <i>citta</i> contemplating joy; no mention of all five joys and six pairs	First four stages: five joys (<i>pīti</i>), six pairs (<i>yugala</i>), bodily and mental happiness (<i>kāyasukha</i> and <i>cittasukha</i>), and <i>ānāpānasati</i>
No mention of <i>namo buddhāya</i> and its association with five colours, elements, Buddhas, animals and joys	<i>Namo buddhāya</i> linked to five colours, elements, Buddhas, animals and joys arising in meditation

Table 2.2: Main similarities and differences between Sammā Arahaṃ meditation and the first four stages of Saṅgharāja Suk Kai Thuean's system

The above table shows the main similarities and differences between Sammā Arahaṃ meditation and the first four stages of Saṅgharāja Suk's system. In summary, there is clear

evidence that Luang Pho Sot has taken and adapted aspects of Saṅgharāja Suk’s meditation system and incorporated them into Sammā Arahaṃ meditation, namely the bodily bases, the visualization of the sphere *nimitta*, the usage of the term *dhamma* sphere (*duang tham*), the *sammā arahaṃ* mantra and the visions of inner bodies with a crown, a necklace and a breast chain. The visions of inner bodies also exist in Luang Pho Niam’s and Luang Pho Nong’s teachings, but the description of them having a crown, a necklace and a breast chain is only found in Saṅgharāja Suk’s system. With regard to the description of *nibbāna* as a glass city, as it is only a single reference, and without any further clarification by Luang Pho Wira, it is still inconclusive whether Luang Pho Sot has come across it. The only explanation Luang Pho Wira gave with regard to this epithet is that it was taken from older sources and used by ancient teachers.

As I mentioned above, the epithet of *nibbāna* as a ‘city’ is mentioned in a collection of sermons by the nineteenth Supreme Patriarch of Bangkok, Somdet Phra Yansangwon (Charoen Suvaḍḍhano), the late abbot of Wat Bowonniwet. I agree with Luang Pho Wira that this epithet seems to be derived from older sources as it is found in a number of *borān kammaṭṭhāna* texts. For example, Kitchai Urkasame’s PhD thesis (2013) discusses a text titled ‘*Buddhanorakan*’ from Wat Bodhi Sri, Mahasarakam province, dated 1923. This text, composed by a high-ranking monk, ‘Somdet Tha’, also describes *nibbāna* as ‘the glass/crystal city’¹¹⁹ and ‘a comfortable and peaceful place entirely free from sensations of suffering’ and a place where ‘one could see the Buddha’ (Kitchai 2013: 78–79). I shall now

¹¹⁹ เมืองแก้ว.

discuss another *borān kammaṭṭhāna* manual, which contains a similar epithet of *nibbāna*, namely the meditation manual of Wat Pradusongtham, Ayutthaya.

2.4.2 Meditation manual and living tradition at Wat Pradusongtham, Ayutthaya

The second *borān kammaṭṭhāna* method that is confirmed to be one of the sources of Sammā Arahaṃ meditation is that of Wat Pradusongtham, Ayutthaya. Wat Pradusongtham was an important *borān kammaṭṭhāna* centre during the Ayutthaya period associated with forest-dwelling monks' (*araññavāsī*) division of the *saṅgha* and was the residence of Phra Rachakhana, who was responsible for overseeing meditation practices (Choompolpaisal forthcoming: 24).¹²⁰ It was first mentioned in the Royal Chronicles as receiving the patronage of Phra Chao Songtham or King Boromracha I (r. 1608–1628), the 21st king of Ayutthaya and the fifth monarch of the House of Sukhothai.¹²¹ It is also the temple where King Uthumphon, the penultimate monarch of Ayutthaya, resided as a monk after being forced to abdicate, having reigned for only two months in 1758. In 1760, King Uthumphon disrobed to help the Ayutthaya forces against the invading Burmese armies, and after the latter's retreat was ordained again at Wat Pradusongtham. King Taksin, shortly after his coronation, invited Phra Achan Dee, a monk from Wat Pradusongtham, to become the first Supreme Patriarch of Thonburi. Two *borān kammaṭṭhāna* masters, namely Saṅgharāja Suk Kai Thuean and Saṅgharāja Don, whose meditation manuals have been preserved in the

¹²⁰ During the Ayutthaya period, the *saṅgha* was divided into two divisions: forest-dwelling monks (*araññavāsī*) and town-dwelling monks (*gāmāvāsī*). The forest-dwelling monks were responsible for overseeing meditation practices and the town-dwelling monks (*gāmāvāsī*) were responsible for administrative duties. Both divisions had their own Saṅgharāja appointed by the king.

¹²¹ For a history of the temple, see Wat Pradusongtham (2012) and May (2009).

Chai Yasothornrat anthology, also studied meditation at the temple (Choompolpaisal forthcoming: 24). Saṅgharāja Suk Kai Thuean was ordained as a monk at Wat Pradusongtham prior to taking up residence as the abbot of a nearby temple, Wat Thahoi, Ayutthaya. Thus, this meditation tradition may have been an influence on Saṅgharāja Suk's and other *borān kammaṭṭhāna* systems during the Thonburi and early Bangkok periods.

Mettanando's thesis (1998) first introduced me to Wat Pradusongtham's collection of meditation manuals in the Chai Yasothornrat anthology. One of the manuals titled '*Kammaṭṭhāna method: the rooms of buddhagūṇa, dhammagūṇa and saṅghagūṇa*' (Chai 1935: 267–285), which has yet to be translated and analysed, is of particular importance as it mentions twice the attainment of '*dhammakāya*'. However, as the temple is neither referred to in any biographies of Luang Pho Sot nor came up in any of the interviews I conducted with teachers and practitioners of Sammā Arahaṃ meditation, I did not think of visiting it. Having already analysed and translated passages from the above manual, I was later made aware by Choompolpaisal (2019) of the living meditation tradition at the temple, and recalled that Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam made references to the temple in connection with Luang Pho Sot's ordination-proclaiming teacher (*anusāvanācāriya*) and first meditation teacher: Luang Pho Nong Indasuvanno, Wat Amphawan, Suphanburi.

According to Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam, Luang Pho Nong travelled to Ayutthaya to practise '*dhutaṅga*' by sleeping in the open air in the vicinity of Wat Pradusongtham

several times (Phra Ratchaphromyan 2005: 227).¹²² On one occasion, Luang Pho Nong met a layman who volunteered to construct a Buddha image for him. This image became the principal image in the ordination hall of Wat Amphawan (Phra Ratchaphromyan 2005: 227). Although there is no direct mention of Luang Pho Nong studying meditation there, the fact that he practised *dhutaṅga* in the vicinity of the temple more than once probably means that he was at least aware of the significance of the temple and the meditation tradition there. I made a hypothesis that due to the temple's influence and its connection with Luang Pho Nong, Luang Pho Sot may have made a visit to the temple and even practised meditation there. I went to Wat Pradusongtham and discussed this with the abbot, Phra Athikan Damrong Thīṭāsapo (1951–), who recommended that I contact Prayok Niamnet or Achan Daeng (1950–), a lay meditation teacher and one of the lineage holders of the tradition. Achan Daeng was a monk at Wat Huchang, Nonthaburi, for almost ten years. He studied meditation at Wat Pradusongtham for four years and became a meditation teacher of Wat Pradusongtham's tradition. After disrobing in 1980, he continued to teach meditation at Wat Pradusongtham up to the present day (Prayok 2019). I visited Achan Daeng at his home in Nonthaburi, and it was confirmed by him that Luang Pho Sot visited Wat Pradusongtham and studied meditation under a renowned lay meditation teacher, Achan Chap Suwan (1883–1958), prior to developing Sammā Arahaṃ meditation.

¹²² *Dhutaṅga* is a group of 13 non-compulsory ascetic practices available for monks. These are: 1) wearing robes made from abandoned cloths; 2) having only three robes; 3) eating only food collected on alms round; 4) not skipping any house while going for alms; 5) eating one meal a day; 6) eating only from the alms bowl; 7) not accepting any extra food; 8) dwelling in the forest; 9) dwelling under a tree; 10) dwelling in the open air; 11) dwelling in or nearby a charnel ground; 12) being satisfied with whatever dwelling; and 13) renouncing the lying posture (see Th 842–865).

I shall provide translations and an analysis of the manual ‘*Kammaṭṭhāna method: the rooms of buddhagūṇa, dhammagūṇa and saṅghagūṇa*’ focusing on the two mentions of the attainment of ‘*dhammakāya*’, and then discuss the living tradition at Wat Pradusongtham and my interview with Achan Daeng.

This manual in the Chai Yasothonrat anthology claims a lineage of teachers going back to ancient India. In the preface, Chai Yasothonrat states that Wat Pradusongtham’s collection was obtained from Wat Manichonkhan, Lopburi, in B.E. 2478 (1935 C.E.), and the original manuscript was obtained from ‘Wat Pradurongtham, Ayutthaya’ and (in brackets) ‘Old City’ (Chai 1935: 10–11). This is most likely to mean that Chai believes that the collection goes back to the Ayutthaya period prior to its final destruction by the Burmese army in 1767. Choompolpaisal’s 2019 article, which discusses all *borān kammaṭṭhāna* texts in the Chai Yasothonrat anthology, dates this collection to some time during the late Ayutthaya period (c. eighteenth century). ‘Pradurongtham’ is the former name of the temple and is derived from the merging of two temples Wat Pradu and Wat Rongtham. The name was changed to Pradusongtham during the reign of King Chulalongkorn (Rama V, r. 1868–1910).

According to the text, the method was passed down from ‘56 prominent teachers of India’¹²³ in B.E. 572’¹²⁴ (Chai 1935: 369). It consists of visualizing three diagrams described as

¹²³ มัธยมประเทศ, literally ‘middle country’ and is synonymous with India. The number 56 is an auspicious number that corresponds to the 56 syllables of the *iti pi so* formula.

¹²⁴ This would be the year 29 C.E.

yantras.¹²⁵ The diagrams represent three rooms (*hong*) of the qualities of the Buddha, Dhamma and *saṅgha*. The room of the qualities of the Buddha contains 56 circles. Each circle has a number and a Khom syllable taken from the Pāli verse describing the qualities of the Buddha: *iti pi so bhagavā araham sammāsaṃbuddho vijjācaraṇasaṃpanno sugato lokavidū anuttarapurisadammasārathī satthā devamanussānaṃ buddho bhagavā ti*.¹²⁶ In the Dhajagga Sutta (S I 218), the Buddha advises the monks that they should recite this formula to recollect his qualities in order to dispel fear. In Thailand and other Theravāda countries, they are part of standard chanting texts and are chanted regularly by monastics in ceremonies. The usage of the formula as mantras and *yantras* in Cambodia has been identified by Bizot and von Hinüber (1994: 69–84) in *La guirlande de bijoux* and summarized in Crosby (2000: 161–165). The visualization of *yantras* as a meditation exercise is also common in *borān kammaṭṭhāna*. The Chai Yasothornrat anthology contains many elaborate diagrams, one of which is a diagram of mythical serpents or *nāgas*, which became its front cover. The Vientiane text in the anthology contains a diagram of the footprint of the Buddha as an object of visualization (Chai 1935: 162). This practice, or course, is absent in Sammā Arahāṃ meditation.

¹²⁵ *Yantras* are protective diagrams consisting of geometrical, animal and deity designs accompanied by Pāli phrases. They can come in different forms, such as an etching on a flat piece of metal, ink drawn on a piece of cloth, or as tattoos on different parts of the body.

¹²⁶ ‘The Blessed One is an *arahant*, perfectly enlightened, accomplished in true knowledge and conduct, fortunate, knower of the world, unsurpassed leader of persons to be tamed, teacher of *devas* and humans, the Enlightened One, the Blessed One’; translation by Bodhi (2000: 319).

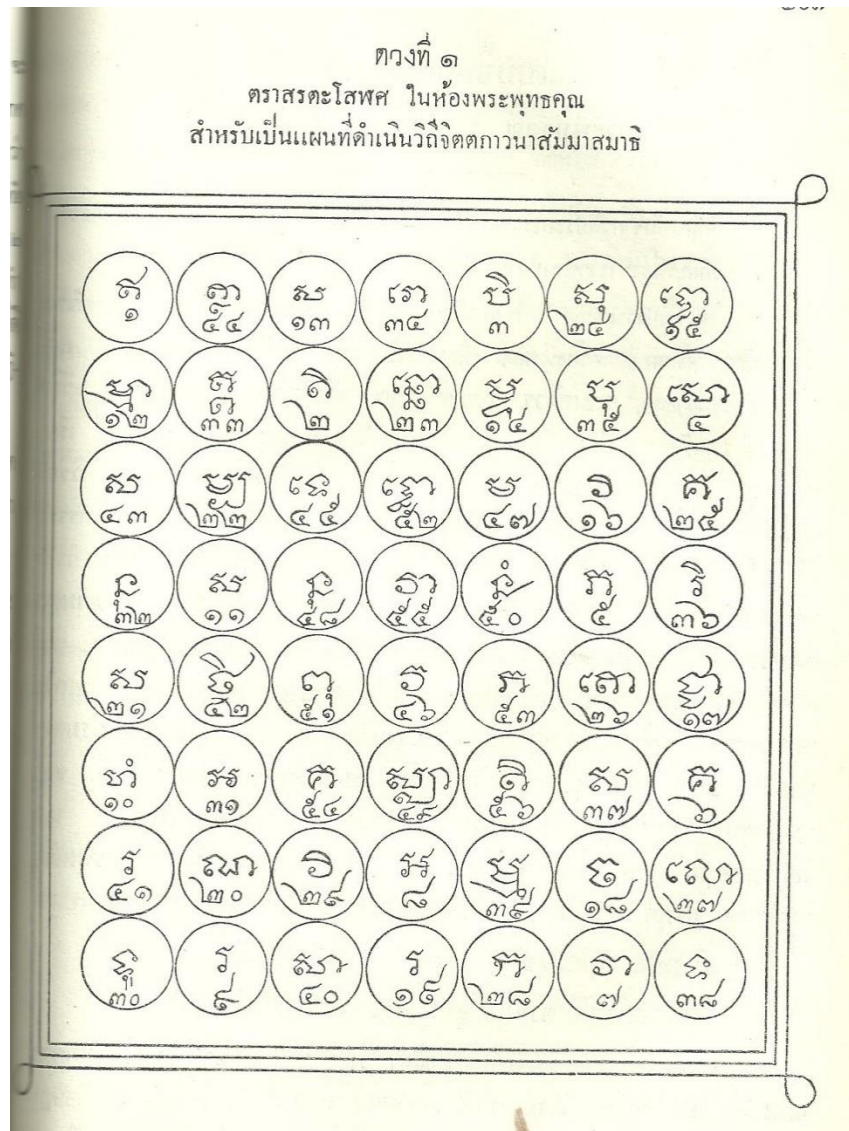


Figure 2.10: Qualities of the Buddha *yantra* in the Chai Yasothonrat anthology

(Chai 1935: 267).

The room of *dhammaguṇa* contains 38 circles, each with a number and a Khom syllable taken from the Pāli verse describing the qualities of the Dhamma: *svākhāto bhagavatā*

*dhammo sandiṭṭhiko akāliko ehipassiko opanayiko paccataṃ veditabbo viññūhī ti.*¹²⁷ The room of *saṅghagūṇa*, likewise, contains 121 circles each with a number and a Khom syllable taken from the Pāli verse describing the qualities of the *saṅgha*: *supaṭipanno bhagavato sāvakaśaṅgho ujupaṭipanno bhagavato sāvakaśaṅgho ñāyapaṭipanno bhagavato sāvakaśaṅgho sāmīcipaṭipanno bhagavato sāvakaśaṅgho yadidaṃ cattāri purisa yugāni aṭṭha purisa puggalā esa bhagavato sāvakaśaṅgho āhuneyyo pāhuneyyo dakkhiṇeyyo añjalikaraṇīyo anuttaraṃ puññakhettaṃ lokassā ti.*¹²⁸

In preparation for visualization, the system utilizes nine bodily bases. A diagram with descriptions of the functions and qualities of the nine bodily bases is not provided in this manual but is given in another manual within the Wat Pradusongtham collection and translated in Mettanando's thesis (1998: 300–2).

¹²⁷ 'The Dhamma is well expounded by the Blessed One, directly visible, immediate, inviting one to come and see, applicable, to be personally experienced by the wise'; translation by Bodhi (2000: 320).

¹²⁸ 'The Saṅgha of the Blessed One's disciples is practising the good way, practising the straight way, practising the true way, practising the proper way; that is, the four pairs of persons, the eight types of individuals – this Saṅgha of the Blessed One's disciples worthy of gifts, worthy of hospitality, worthy of offerings, worthy of reverential salutation, the unsurpassed field of merit for the world'; translation by Bodhi (2000: 320).



Figure 2.11: Illustration of the nine bodily bases in the Chai Yasothornrat anthology (Chai 1935: 293).

The base at the navel has the quality of ‘appeasing all suffering’.¹²⁹ The chest is where ‘the consciousness of rebirth is joined with the Dhamma of wholesomeness, unwholesomeness and neutrality’.¹³⁰ The end of the throat is for ‘sleeping’; the tip of the nose is ‘the origin of joy and delight’.¹³¹ The eyes are ‘the origin of the wisdom eye’ for ‘seeing good and evil’.¹³² Between the eyebrows is ‘for purification of the mind’.¹³³ The top of the head is

¹²⁹ เป็นที่ระงับทุกข์ทั้งปวง.

¹³⁰ เป็นที่ปฏิสนธิวิญญาณเจือไปด้วยกุศลธรรม อกุศลธรรมและอัพยาทุกต.

¹³¹ เป็นที่ทำให้เกิดปีติและปราโมทย์.

¹³² เป็นที่ทำให้เกิดปัญญาจักขุ พิจารณาเห็นบาปบุญคุณโทษ.

¹³³ เป็นที่ชำระมลทินโทษ.

the ‘house of patience and graciousness’.¹³⁴ The occipital part of the head houses ‘mindfulness’ and is ‘the controller of all feeling and abnormal thoughts’ etc. (Mettanando 1998: 301–2).¹³⁵ The base just above the navel, three finger breadths beneath the skin, which is the closest to the seventh base of Sammā Arahaṃ meditation, is said to ‘quench all unwholesome thoughts and fosters wholesome thoughts’ and is ‘the location of the four elements and the assembling ground for the six elements, eighteen elements’ etc. (Mettanando 1998: 301).¹³⁶

The description of this last base as the location of the elements bears similarities to the description of the *dhamma* sphere in Sammā Arahaṃ meditation, which resides at the seventh base, two finger widths above the navel. As I mentioned above, inside the *dhamma* sphere located at the seventh base there are five basic elements: water, earth, wind, fire and space. The water element controls the fluidity of the body. The earth element controls the solidity, the wind element the internal movement of gases, the fire element the body temperature, the space element the spaces in the body. Inside the space element lies the consciousness element (*viññāṇadhātu*), which controls the consciousness. Out of the nine bodily bases, Sammā Arahaṃ only uses seven, and focuses most of its practice at the seventh base. The remaining six bases serve merely as resting places of the mind and are only used at the basic level.

¹³⁴ เป็นที่ตั้งแห่งขันติและโสรจธรรม.

¹³⁵ เป็นที่ตั้งสนิทของสติสัมปชัญญะ เป็นที่เก็บเวทนาทั้งปวง เป็นที่ระงับวิสภาคามณทั้งปวง.

¹³⁶ เป็นที่ระงับอกุศลจิตตัณยกุศลธรรมให้เกิดขึ้นได้โดยสะดวก เป็นที่ประชุมธาตุ ๔ และสัมปยุตต์ธาตุ ๖ ธาตุ ๑๘ ชุมนวมลงเป็นธาตุ.

The *Rooms of buddhaguṇa, dhammaguṇa and saṅhaguṇa* manual mentions various times the Pāli words *lokuttaram cittaṃ jhānaṃ*, which are described as ‘the mind’, ‘neutral dhamma’, ‘the resting place and the food of the mind [*citta*] having happiness and delight as food’ and ‘the refuge of the mind’ (Chai 1935: 269).¹³⁷ From looking at other *borān kammaṭṭhāna* texts in conjunction with this manual, *lokuttaram cittaṃ jhānaṃ*, which are Pāli terms referring to a supra-mundane *jhāna* or mental absorption, is most likely to be both a mantra, which is to be recited during meditation, and also a vision of a luminous sphere perhaps marked by Pāli syllables in Khom script, as these are the most common visions in *borān kammaṭṭhāna*. For each diagram, the text instructs the practitioner to place *lokuttaram cittaṃ jhānaṃ* at the base between the eyes, then move it to the tip of the nose, and visualize the first circle to the last circle and in reverse order.

After visualizing the diagram of *buddhaguṇa*, the text describes the attainment of ‘*dhammakāya*’. Below is my translation of this passage:

Then, lift the mind, *lokuttaram cittaṃ jhānaṃ*, until one destroys *prakṛti* = *parā* = *aparā*.¹³⁸ *Kāyasukhaṃ*, bodily happiness, and *cittasukkhaṃ*, mental

¹³⁷ ธรรมกลางสำหรับเป็นที่พักและเป็นอาหารของใจ คือมีปิติและปราโมทย์เป็นที่รักษา.

¹³⁸ The text repeats this instruction after one has visualized the room of *dhammaguṇa*. The Sanskrit word *aparā* is stated to consist of earth, water, wind, fire, space, mind (*mana*), intelligence (*buddhi*) and false ego (*ahaṃkāra*) and *parā* is said to be the subject and cause of *lokānuvaṭṭa* or the *saṃsāric* world (Chai 1935: 269 and 277). These concepts are found in Hindu texts, notably in verses four and five of the seventh chapter of the Bhagavad-gītā, and refer to the physical aspect (*aparā prakṛti*) and the phenomenal mental aspect (*parā prakṛti*) of created nature (*prakṛti*). *Parā prakṛti* or mental aspect is superior to *aparā prakṛti* or physical aspect as *parā prakṛti* is a fragment of the Supreme Being or *Puruṣa*. *Parā* is synonymous with the word *jīva*, or the individual souls of living beings, which, in Hindu thought, are eternal and in their manipulation of matter sustain the universe. In the text, it is not clear how exactly the practitioner is to ‘destroy’ them. I speculate that *prakṛti*, *parā* and *aparā* represent the practitioner’s negative mental and physical energies that one must get rid of in order to progress to the higher attainments.

happiness, arise within me. When the body and the mind are happy, one becomes *santuṭṭho*, one who is content, *sallekho*, one of pure conduct, *pahitatto*, one who directs oneself towards a future goodness.¹³⁹

Then, set up the mind to examine *dhammakāya* in *rūpakāya* by proceeding in the Seven Factors of Enlightenment, until the mind realizes and penetrates *rūpadhamma* and *nāmadhamma*. Then, one has self as refuge, has *dhamma* as refuge in this way. (Chai 1935: 269)¹⁴⁰

After the diagram of *dhammaguṇa* has been visualized, the text mentions the attainment of ‘a luminescent and inconceivable *deva* form’:

Dhamma that is first from the mind obtains a refuge, which is abundant in happiness that one is able to know and see for oneself. Because one whose mind consists of *samādhi* does not consist of restlessness, and proceeds through each level with one’s mental stream, the mind will attain a *deva* state that is very pure; the knowledge that knows all [*sabbaññutañña*];

Bhagavad-gītā (7.4-5): *bhūmir āpo 'nalo vayuḥ khaṁ mano buddhir eva ca ahaṁkāra itīyaṁ me bhinnā prakṛtir aṣṭadhā apareyam itas tv anyāṁ prakṛtiṁ viddhi me parām jīva-bhūtāṁ mahā-bāho yayedam dhāryate jagat*

Translation: Earth, water, fire, air, ether, mind, intelligence and false ego – all together these eight constitute my separated material energies. Besides these, O might-armed Arjuna, there is another, superior energy of mine, which comprises the living entities who are exploiting the resources of this material, inferior nature. From Bhaktivedanta (1972).

¹³⁹ ต่อนั้นให้ยกจิตต์ โลกุตตร จิตต์ ฌาน จนนทำลาย ประภคิต = ปรา = อปรา ได้แล้ว กายสุข ความสุขกาย จิตตสุข ความสุขจิตต์ จักเกิดมีที่อาตมา เมื่อกายเป็นสุข จิตต์เป็นสุขแล้ว สนฺตญฺโฐ เป็นผู้สันโดษ สลฺเลโข เป็นผู้ประพฤตฺชิดเกลา ปหิตตฺโต เป็นผู้มิตนสง ไปสู่คุณความดีเป็นเบื้องหน้า.

¹⁴⁰ ตั้งจิตต์พิจารณาธรรมกายในรูปกายด้วยการดำเนินในโพชฌงค์ทั้ง ๗ ประการ จนจิตตรู้แจ้งแทงตลอดในรูปธรรมและนามธรรม ได้แล้ว จักมิตนเป็นที่พึ่ง จักมีธรรมเป็นที่พึ่ง ด้วยประการนี้[...]

clearly sees; knows the ends of the world; lasting; is the controller and the most refined of all refined things. Because it has a form [*rūpa*] that is inconceivable [*acinteyya*], luminescent and clear, floating above darkness that is ignorance. (Chai 1935: 277)¹⁴¹

Lastly, at the very end, after the diagram of *saṅghagūṇa* has been visualized, the text again mentions the attainment of *dhammakāya*:

The *yogāvacara* who realizes that *dhammakāya* exists in the country of the heart [*hadaya-pradeśa*] of all beings [*sabbabhūta*], this causes them to spin like a robot. The venerable thus persists in the cultivation of insight knowledge to reach *dhammakāya*, which is the greatest refuge, and reach the place of calmness, nobleness and permanence, for that which the *dhammakāya* brings is eternal. (Chai 1935: 283)¹⁴²

Although the word *nibbāna* is not mentioned here, the place of calmness, nobleness and permanence clearly refers to *nibbāna* and the attainment of arahatship as it is to be reached through the cultivation of insight knowledge (*vipassanā ñāṇa*). The descriptions of *dhammakāya* being ‘in’ the physical body (*rūpakāya*), existing ‘in the country of the hearts

¹⁴¹ ธรรมอันเอกด้วยจิตต์ จักได้ที่พึงอันอุดมสุข อันเจ้าตัวจะพึงรู้เองเห็นเอง เพราะว่าผู้มีใจประกอบด้วยสมาธิ ไม่ประกอบด้วยใจฟุ้งส
รำน ดำเนินกระแสจิตต์เป็นลำดับ จิตต์ย่อมบรรลุลักษณะเป็นทิพย์ที่บริสุทธิ์อย่างยิ่ง อันเป็นส่วนสัพพัญญุตญาณ เห็นชัด หยั่งทราบ
ที่สุดโลก ยั่งยืน เป็นผู้บังคับ และละเอียดที่สุดแต่บรรดาสิ่งที่ละเอียดด้วยกัน เพราะมีรูปเป็นอินทรีย์ รุ่งเรืองสุกใส ลอยเด่นอยู่เหนือ
ความมืด คือ อวิชชา ฯ

¹⁴² พระโยคาวจรผู้รู้วาทธรรมกายดำรงอยู่ในหทัยประเทศ แห่งสรรพภูต ทำให้หม่นดั่งว่าหุ่นยนต์ ท่านจึงตั้งใจเจริญพระวิปัสสนาญาณ
เพื่อให้ถึงธรรมกายที่เป็นที่พึงอันยอดเยี่ยมโดยสิ้นเชิง ถึงสถานที่อันสงบระงับประเสริฐเที่ยงแท้ เพราะความอานวยของธรรมกายนั้นเป็น อมตะ

of all beings’ and the equation of *dhammakāya* with arahatship and the place of calmness, nobleness and permanence bear similarities to Luang Pho Sot’s understanding of *dhammakāya* and *āyatana* (*nibbāna*). According to Luang Pho Sot, *dhammakāyas* exist within the enlightened ones’ minds while they are still alive, and after their final *nibbāna*, their *dhammakāyas* forever dwell in *āyatana* (*nibbāna*), the unconditioned realm. The attainment of *dhammakāya* being the greatest refuge and as equivalent to having oneself as a refuge are also similar to Luang Pho Sot’s explanation of reaching the inner bodies and *dhammakāya* as having oneself as a refuge. The mind that attains ‘the *deva* state’ that is described as having the ‘knowledge that knows all’ (*sabbaññutañāṇa*) and ‘a form (*rūpa*) that is inconceivable (*acinteyya*), luminescent and clear’ also bears certain similarities to the vision of *dhammakāya* in Sammā Arahant meditation being luminous and clear as a crystal and the description of *nibbāna* in the teachings of Luang Pho Nong and Luang Pho Niam. As described above, Luang Pho Nong’s and Luang Pho Niam’s understanding of *nibbāna* as a special *deva* state that is beyond *samsāra* became an influence on Luang Pho Sot’s understanding of *nibbāna*. However, Luang Pho Sot does not describe *dhammakāya* as a *deva* state but as an appearance of the Triple Gems.

Choompolpaisal’s article (2019: 23–24) introduces me to the living meditation tradition whose technique has links with Wat Pradusongtham manuals in the Chai Yasothornrat anthology. In his interview with Achan Surat Songsakaew (1936–), a lay meditation teacher and another lineage holder at Wat Pradusongtham, Choompolpaisal (2019: 24) states that in contrast to Saṅgharāja Suk Kai Thuean’s tradition, which relies heavily on textual authority, the current technique taught at Wat Pradusongtham relies only in part on

textual authority due to the loss of many manuals, especially the ones for beginners. Choompolpaisal (2019: 24) showed the Chai Yasothonrat anthology to Achan Surat and the only manual in the anthology that Surat recognized was the one with the diagram of the nine bodily bases and their characteristics and functions, as shown above. The technique currently taught is a simplified version of the old system based mainly on previous teachers' practice and experience (Choompolpaisal 2019: 24). From his description of the current technique, it is clear that the system has links with Saṅgharāja Suk Kai Thuean's system and Sammā Arahaṃ meditation. The basic technique consists of mindfulness of breath (*ānāpānasati*), visualization of a sphere *nimitta* at the end of the breath passage, around the stomach, until a vision of a bright light, which is termed '*ong bhāvanā*', or 'meditation entity' appears (Choompolpaisal 2019: 25). This is very similar to the basic technique of Sammā Arahaṃ meditation in its practice of *ānāpānasati* and the visualization of the bright sphere at the end of the breath passage. In Wat Pradusongtham's current system, the nine bodily bases are utilized in more advanced levels as the '*ong bhāvanā*' light sphere is used to invoke meditation subjects, also to be seen as light spheres, which are moved around the body in forward and reverse orders. The different meditation subjects invoked include *brahmavihāras*,¹⁴³ *kaṣiṇas*, *asubhas*,¹⁴⁴ and *buddhagaṇas* (Choompolpaisal 2019: 25).

In my interview with Achan Daeng, he confirmed that Luang Pho Sot had studied meditation with Achan Chap Suwan at Wat Pradusongtham prior to developing Sammā

¹⁴³ *Brahmavihāras* are the four divine or holy abidings. They consist of *mettā* (loving kindness), *karuṇā* (compassion), *muditā* (sympathetic joy) and *upekkhā* (equanimity).

¹⁴⁴ *Asubhas* are the ten types of foulness or corpses at different stages of decay: bloated corpse, bluish corpse, festering corpse, cut-up corpse, gnawed corpse, scattered corpse, mutilated corpse, bleeding corpse, worm-infested corpse and skeleton.

Arahaṃ meditation. He informed me that one of his meditation teachers, Luang Pho Sala Therapañño (1914–1993), often pointed out to him the hut that Luang Pho Sot slept in while studying meditation at Wat Pradusongtham (Prayok 2019). Achan Chap Suwan or ‘Kong Chap’¹⁴⁵ (1883–1958) was a lay meditation teacher, an adept in earth (*paṭhavī*) *kasiṇa*, who taught many renowned meditation masters, including: 1) Luang Pho Thiam (1904–1979), Wat Kasattrathirat, Ayutthaya; 2) Luang Pho Ki (1901–1979), Wat Huchang, who was Achan Daeng’s uncle and meditation teacher; 3) Luang Pho Pluem (1907–2002), Wat Suan Hong, Suphanburi; and 4) Luang Pho Yongyut (1927–2002), Wat Khao Maidaeng, Chonburi (Wat Pradusongtham 2012: 28). Achan Chap was also a friend of Luang Pho Pan Sonando, Wat Bang Khonom, Ayutthaya. As I mentioned above, Luang Pho Pan was Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam’s main meditation teacher and a friend and meditation colleague of Luang Pho Sot. Luang Pho Sot and Luang Pho Pan had to examine each other’s meditation progress while studying with Luang Pho Niam Dhammajoti at Wat Noi, Suphanburi. According to Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam, Achan Chap was an adept not only in meditation but also in traditional medicine, and was responsible for curing Luang Pho Pan from ‘a black magic curse’ that almost took Luang Pho Pan’s life (Phra Ratchaphromyan 2001: 20–21).

¹⁴⁵ ฅาน สวรรณ (คอง ฅาน).

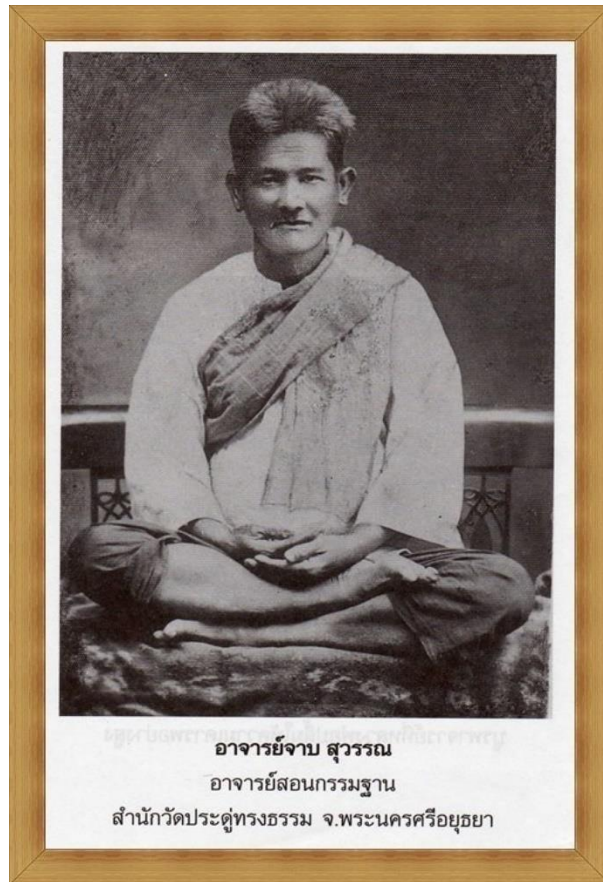


Figure 2.12: Photograph of Achan Chap Suwan. The caption states: ‘Achan Chap Suwan: the meditation teacher of Wat Pradusongtham school, Ayutthaya province’ (courtesy of Wat Pradusongtham).



Figure 2.13: *Stūpa* containing the ashes of Achan Chap Suwan at Wat Pradusongtham, Ayutthaya (photograph by the author).

I showed Achan Daeng all the manuals in Wat Pradusongtham's collection in the Chai Yasothonrat anthology and asked him whether he had come across any of them. Like Achan Surat Songsakaew, the only manual Achan Daeng recognized is the one with the diagram of the nine bodily bases and their characteristics. This means that the rest of the collection, including *The rooms of buddhaguṇa*, *dhammaguṇa* and *saṅghaguṇa*, were lost

sometime after the publication of the Chai Yasothonrat anthology in 1935. I informed Achan Daeng that there are similarities between the current technique at Wat Pradusongtham and Sammā Arahaṃ meditation. The similarities include visualization of a sphere *nimitta* around the stomach and at the bodily bases. This led me to believe that this technique may have influenced Luang Pho Sot's development of Sammā Arahaṃ meditation. Achan Daeng agreed with me and added the recitation of '*sammā phra arahaṃ*' as another aspect that Luang Pho Sot may have adopted (Prayok 2019). In Wat Pradusongtham's current system '*sammā phra arahaṃ*' is recited while performing mindfulness of breath. '*Phra*', which in Thai can be translated as 'honourable' or 'venerable', indicates the respect given to the Buddha's qualities while reciting the Pāli words that represent them. According to Achan Daeng, Luang Pho Sot may have dropped the word '*phra*' from Wat Pradusongtham's mantra and opted to use just '*sammā arahaṃ*' instead (Prayok 2019). I then asked whether the visions of inner bodies, *dharmakāya* and the epithet of *nibbāna* as a place exist in the current technique. Achan Daeng replied that they do not.

Sammā Arahaṃ meditation	Wat Pradusongtham's current technique	Wat Pradusongtham's manual (eighteenth century)
Seven bodily bases	Nine bodily bases	Nine bodily bases
<i>Sammā arahaṃ</i> mantra	<i>Sammā phra arahaṃ</i> mantra	<i>Lokuttaraṃ cittaṃ jhānaṃ</i> mantra
No <i>yantra</i> visualization	No <i>yantra</i> visualization	Visualization of <i>yantra</i>

Visions of spheres; the term <i>dharmma</i> sphere; no mention of <i>ong bhāvanā</i>	Visions of spheres; the term <i>ong bhāvanā</i> ; no mention of <i>dharmma</i> sphere	No mention of <i>dharmma</i> sphere or <i>ong bhāvanā</i>
Visions of inner bodies; visions of <i>dharmmakāya</i> appearing like a translucent Buddha statue; <i>dharmmakāya</i> as a refuge; <i>āyatana (nibbāna)</i> as an unconditioned and permanent realm	No mention of visions of inner bodies, <i>dharmmakāya</i> , or <i>nibbāna</i> as a place	<i>Dharmmakāya</i> in the physical body; <i>dharmmakāya</i> as the greatest refuge; <i>dharmmakāya</i> synonymous with the luminescent and inconceivable <i>deva</i> form and the place of calmness, nobleness and permanence

Table 2.3: Main similarities and differences between Sammā Arahaṃ meditation and Wat Pradusongtham’s current technique and the eighteenth-century manual

The above table shows the main similarities and differences between Sammā Arahaṃ meditation and Wat Pradusongtham’s current technique and the eighteenth-century manual, *The rooms of buddhaguṇa, dharmmaguṇa and saṅghaguṇa* in the Chai Yasothornrat anthology. The aspects of Wat Pradusongtham’s current technique that are similar to Sammā Arahaṃ meditation, namely the recitation of ‘*sammā phra arahaṃ*’, visualization of a light sphere and the bodily bases, are also present in Saṅgharāja Suk Kai Thuean’s system and are common characteristics of *borān kammaṭṭhāna* found in many systems of the tradition. In the light of these recurring aspects, it is clear that these common elements

in Sammā Arahaṃ meditation are not derived from a single source but are the outcomes of Luang Pho Sot having been trained in a number of *borān kammaṭṭhāna* systems, not only at Wat Ratchasittharam and Wat Pradusongtham but also at other temples as well. As mentioned above, the visualization of the sphere *nimitta* around the stomach is also taught by another teacher of Luang Pho Sot, namely Achan Sing, Wat Lakhontham, the one who invited Luang Pho Sot to become a meditation teacher of his tradition (*63 sermons* 1984 (3)).

With regard to *The rooms of buddhagūṇa, dhammagūṇa and saṅghagūṇa*, this manual should not be overlooked as a possible source of Sammā Arahaṃ meditation. Although there is currently no evidence to support this claim, in my opinion there is a strong possibility that Luang Pho Sot studied or came across this manual and its references to *dhammakāya* while residing at Wat Pradusongtham. The only period in which Luang Pho Sot could have visited Wat Pradusongtham was between 1905 and 1916, which was 19 to 30 years before the publication of the Chai Yasothonrat anthology. If the manual was accessible to Phra Upāli Khunupamachan (Chan Siricando) prior to 1932 (the year of Phra Upāli's death), then it is most likely to have been accessible to Luang Pho Sot between 1905 and 1916. The most striking aspects of the manual are its mention of the attainments of *dhammakāya*, which is described as being in the physical body (*rūpakāya*) and as the greatest refuge, and its equation with the luminescent and inconceivable *deva* form and the place of calmness, nobleness and permanence. These aspects, along with the teachings of Luang Pho Niam and Luang Pho Nong, could have influenced Luang Pho Sot's understanding of *dhammakāya* and *nibbāna*.

2.5 Other possible influences on Luang Pho Sot's development of Sammā Arahaṃ meditation

2.5.1 Meditation manual and Traibhūmi manuscript of King Taksin of Thonburi

Another important *borān kammaṭṭhāna* manual worth mentioning is the meditation manual of King Taksin of Thonburi. Although there is currently no evidence that Luang Pho Sot came across it, I have included this meditation text under this section due to its significance and the location of the temple where it is preserved.

King Taksin (r. 1767–82) is among past Thai monarchs who are today called ‘Mahārāja’ or the Great King by the Thai public, having claimed ‘independence’ from Burmese occupation after the fall of Ayutthaya in 1767. King Taksin established Thonburi as the Thai capital and became the only king of this capital. He reigned for 15 years before he was deposed and executed by King Rama I in 1782. Apart from being a warrior, King Taksin was also known as a devoted Buddhist and meditation practitioner.

Arthid Sheravanichkul (2012b) points to two contradictory groups of narratives regarding King Taksin's deposition, which relate to his meditation practice. One set of narratives, which includes the Thonburi Chronicle, the Memoir of Her Royal Highness Princess Kromluang Narintharathewi and the Annals of the Astrologers, blames meditation for King Taksin's insanity, which led to disruption, chaos and the justification of his execution and King Rama I's succession to the throne. However, according to Arthid (2012b), another group of ‘popular narratives’ paints the king's meditation practice in a more positive light.

Some of these accounts were obtained from popular legends and from renowned Thai meditation masters' contacts with the spirit of King Taksin. These meditation masters include Phra Thamsinghaburachan (Luang Pho Charan Thitadhammo), the abbot of Wat Amphawan, Singburi; *Bhikṣuṇī* Voramai Kabilsingh, the first Thai woman to receive ordination from both the male and the female *saṅgha*, and Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam, the founder of the Manomayiddhi meditation tradition. They rejected the story of the king's insanity and execution, and claimed that the king, through meditation practice, achieved a high level of spiritual attainment, wanted to give up the throne, was ordained and fled to live in a cave in Nakhon Sri Thammarat, where he continued to practise meditation and attained arahatship. Other sources, such as Som Suchira, also claim that he was a *bodhisatta*.¹⁴⁶

Arthid introduced me to a meditation manual allegedly composed by King Taksin. It was obtained by Mali Phromroek from Wat Ratchadathitthan, Bangkok, and printed in an article titled *The final days of Somdet Phachao of Thonburi Kingdom and the khoi manuscript from Wat Ratchadathitthan*¹⁴⁷ by Phairot Photsai in the book *Mystery of King Taksin* edited by Pamin Khruethong.¹⁴⁸ Wat Ratchadathitthan, along with Wat Ratchasittharam and Wat Rachativat, were the three most important *borān kammaṭṭhāna* centres during the reigns of King Rama I (1782–1809) and King Rama II (1809–1824). While the traditions at Wat Ratchadathitthan and Wat Rachativat died out sometime during

¹⁴⁶ For details of these accounts, see Ruesi Lingdam (1975), Suthatsa (2009), Som (2011), Saowalak (2017b) and Voramai (2018).

¹⁴⁷ ปัจจุบันกาลของสมเด็จพระเจ้ากรุงธนบุรีกับสมุดข่อยวัดราชภาฏวน.

¹⁴⁸ ปรีศนาพระเจ้าตาก. This was published in Bangkok in 2012 by Matichon. The article covers pages 314 to 321 of the book.

the nineteenth century, the Suk Kai Thuean tradition at Wat Ratchasittharam survives to the present day (Choompolpaisal forthcoming: 7).

The following is my summary and translations of the important parts of the meditation manual. Unfortunately, the Pāli verses in Khom script in the manual have been left out by the copier. This has been indicated as [อักษรขอม] in the article and I have indicated these omissions as [Khom] in the translation.

The manual is dated day 21 of the full moon of the year of the goat and 1137 of the minor era, which is equivalent to the year 1775 C.E. Its content is said to have been reviewed by Thongkham Alaksanachup, Rachakhana.¹⁴⁹ The method consists of mindfulness of breath (*ānāpānasati*) in order to achieve divine eye and the vision of ‘the Buddha’s *dharmma* sphere’. To achieve the vision of the sphere, the practitioner is to use his/her divine eye and focus his/her concentration at the bodily base known as the ‘*kaeo chat unalom* space’.

The sphere of Buddha’s Dhamma is a secret to all the worlds. The Buddha’s Dhamma is within the mind, at the end of the mind, where the inbreaths and outbreaths are separated.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁹ ราชาคณะ. Rachakhana is the third-highest rank in the Thai *saṅgha*, below the Supreme Patriarch and Somdet Phra Rachakhana.

¹⁵⁰ พระธรรมพระพุทธรเจ้าดวงนี้ เป็นลับแลแก่โลกยทั้งหลาย พระธรรมพระพุทธรเจ้าอยู่ท่ามกลางจิตที่ สุดแห่งที่ลมอัสสาสะ ปัสสาสะจ ชาติตอกันนั้นแล.

The place where all Dhammas gather is at the [*kaeo*] *chat unalom* space¹⁵¹ between the brows where the eyes meet, which is also the place [Khom] of falling asleep. To see the Buddha's Dhamma, one must close one's eyes completely and look still into this *kaeo chat unalom* space with both divine eyes, and then one shall see the Buddha's Dhamma there.¹⁵²

Develop one's outbreaths up on the left and inbreaths down on the right, exhale that air gently to refine it until one masters this. Look at the Buddha's Dhamma sphere with both divine eyes. It will appear rising on the left [Khom] and falling on the right on the in- and outbreaths.¹⁵³

The *unalom* space refers to the area of the pituitary gland behind the eye sockets, which corresponds to the third base in *Sammā Arahaṃ* meditation. *Kaeo chat* means the 'birth' or 'arising' of the 'glass'. The word *kaeo* probably refers to the *dhamma* sphere, which appears like a glass sphere at the *unalom* space. The above translation refers to another bodily base: 'where the inbreaths and outbreaths are separated', which is the area around the navel, corresponding to the sixth and seventh bases in *Sammā Arahaṃ* meditation.

¹⁵¹ ช่องแก้วชาตือนาโลม, literally '*unalom* space of the arising of the glass/crystal'. The word *kaeo* here is indicated by the copier as 'faded' from the text, but I have obtained it from the next sentence. It refers to the bodily base at the area of the pituitary gland behind the eye sockets.

¹⁵² ที่ขุมนมพระธรรมทั้งปวงนั้นตรงช่อง [แก้ว]ชาตือนาโลมที่หว่างคิ้วที่สุดสายตาทิ้งสองรวมกัน แลเป็นที่ [อักษรขอม] หลับแห่งนั้นแล ถ้าแลจให้เฝ้าองค์พระธรรมพระพุทเจ้าใส่ ให้หลับตาลงจงดัด จึงให้เอาตาพิพยทั้งสอง เลงดูพระธรรมพระพุทเจ้าตรงช่องแก้วชาตือนาโลม ลงมานิ่งอยู่จนเห็นพระธรรมพระพุทเจ้า ในที่นั้นแล.

¹⁵³ จึงให้จำเรญปัสสาสะ ขึ้นเบื่องซ้าย แล้วให้จำเรญอัสสาสะ ลงเบื่องขวา ให้ค่อยระบายลมที่นั้นออกมาให้เบา ให้เลียด ออกมาจางขานี ชานาน จึงให้เอาตาพิพยทั้งสองเลงดู ดวงพระธรรมพระพุทเจ้า จขึ้นเบื่องซ้าย [อักษรขอม] จขึ้นเบื่องขวาเป็นอนุโลมปฎิโลม เบื่องบน ลมอัสสาสะ ปัสสาสะนั้นแลฯ.

The text, then, gives three Pāli verses in Khom script. These three ‘Dhamma verses’ are described as ‘leading to the seven books of the Abhidhamma’ and ‘the gathering place of all 84,000 *dhammakhandhas* (the entire teaching of the Buddha) and the factors of enlightenment’.¹⁵⁴ After visualizing their syllables, the practitioner will see the sacred syllables appearing in the *dhamma* sphere in his/her body.

Examine and see the Dhamma with both divine eyes and know with wisdom that the Buddha’s Dhamma that arises at the *kaeo chat unalom* space [Khom] The Buddha’s Dhamma is permanent. Once it is seen with wisdom, one knows that the Buddha’s Dhamma truly arises in the Dhamma Maṇḍala Web/Thread¹⁵⁵ [Khom] Then, take the Tipiṭaka Dhamma Verses and place the wisdom along the Dhamma lines arising in this Dhamma Maṇḍala Web/Thread.¹⁵⁶

The three Dhamma verses are very subtle; they are the gathering place of all 84,000 *dhammakhandhas* and the factors of enlightenment. Once the shoot of the Buddha obtains this Buddha’s Dhamma sphere with wisdom, place the Great Syllables of this verse down into this Dhamma sphere of the Buddha. When the Dhamma rises on the left recollect ‘tu’ [Khom] and when

¹⁵⁴ ‘พระธรรมสามบทนี้ เป็นที่นำเข้าสู่ แห่งพระอภิธรรมทั้งเจดพระกำกัแล’ ‘พระธรรมสามบทนี้สุขุมนักเป็นที่ขุมนุมเข้ามาแห่งพระธรรมแปดหมื่นสี่พันชัณธ แลโพธิปักขยธรรมทั้งปวงแล’.

¹⁵⁵ ไถยมนทลธรรม. From reading the passage below, this refers to the Buddha’s *dhamma* sphere.

¹⁵⁶ จึงพิจารณาให้เห็นพระธรรมด้วยตาทิพย์ทั้งสอง แลรู้ด้วยพระปัญญาจกหมันว่าพระธรรมพระพุทเจ้า อันเกิดขึ้นมาตรงช่องแก้ว ขาดูณโลม [อักษรขอม] พระธรรมพระพุทเจ้าเที่ยงแท้แลครั้งเห่นพระธรรมพระพุทเจ้าแจ้งแก่พระปัญญาแล้วใส่ จึงรู้ว่าพระธรรมพระพุทเจ้าเกิดขึ้น ในไถยมนทลธรรมพระองค์แล้วแท้จริงแล [อักษรขอม] แลเอาบทพระไตรปิฎกธรรมอย่างพระปัญญาลงไปตามแถวธรรม อันเกิดในไถยมนทลธรรมนี้ จงทุกประการแลฯ.

the Dhamma rises on the right side recollect [Khom]. One is to cultivate and master this, until the Great Syllables appear constantly in the Dhamma sphere.¹⁵⁷

The *dhamma* sphere here is described as the Dhamma Maṇḍala Web/Thread, probably referring to a line(s) appearing on the sphere, along which one is to place the Khom syllables.

The significance of this text is that the attainment of a luminous sphere, which is a common *nimitta* in *borān kammaṭṭhāna*, is here described by King Taksin as ‘the Buddha’s *dhamma* sphere’. The Buddha’s *dhamma* sphere is located in two places, one place being the area around the navel. The *dhamma* sphere in King Taksin’s meditation manual is described as ‘a secret to all the worlds’, ‘permanent’, ‘the best in this conditioned world’,¹⁵⁸ ‘the duty of all Venerable Disciples’,¹⁵⁹ which, similarly to Sammā Arahaṇ meditation, seems to refer to the attainments of the paths and fruits leading to arahatship. However, in Sammā Arahaṇ meditation, the *dhamma* spheres are not marked by any Pāli syllables.

The vision of the *dhamma* sphere was not only practised and taught by the king himself, and approved by one of the heads of the *saṅgha*, but also depicted in his edition of the Traibhūmi (Three World cosmology) drawings. Barend Jan Terwiel’s 2014 article titled

¹⁵⁷ พระธรรมสามบทนี้สุขุมนักเป็นที่ขุมนุมาเข้ามาแห่งพระธรรมแปดหมื่นสี่พันชั้นธ แลโพธิปักชยธรรมทั้งปวงแล ครั้นหน่อพุทธานุสรเจ้าได้พระธรรมพระพุทธเจ้าดวงนี้หมั่นแก้ปัญญาแล้วใส่ จึงเอาพระมหาอักษรบทนี้้อยลงสู่พระธรรมพระพุทธเจ้าดวงนี้ ครั้นพระธรรมขึ้นเบื้องซ้าย ให้เฝ้าว่า ตฺ [อักษรรอบ] ครั้นขึ้นเบื้องขวาให้เฝ้าว่า [อักษรรอบ] ให้จำเรณูลงขานขานาญ ให้พระมหาอักษรนี้อยู่ในดวงพระธรรมอย่าคลาดจากธรรมนี้ นี้ใส่.

¹⁵⁸ พระธรรมดวงนี้เป็นที่สุดแห่งชั้นธโลกยนี้แล.

¹⁵⁹ พระธรรมดวงนี้เป็นกิจแห่งพระชินาสพเจ้า.

‘On the Trail of King Taksin’s *Samutphāp Traiphūm*’ introduced me to these drawings. Two illustrated manuscripts of the Three Worlds, one kept in the National Library of Bangkok and the other in the Museum of Asian Art in Berlin, both state that they were made by the order of King Taksin in 1776. In the drawing of the eight types of noble persons (*ariyapuggala*), only the last of the noble persons, the one who has achieved the fruit of arahatship (*arahattaphala*), is depicted as holding a sphere with both hands. Although the drawings do not state the meaning of the sphere, I suggest that they are the drawings of the Buddha’s *dhamma* sphere and represents the attainment of *nibbāna*. The sphere is positioned just above the navel around the area of the stomach, which is the same place as the bodily base mentioned in King Taksin’s manual: at the end of the breath where the in- and out-breaths are separated.

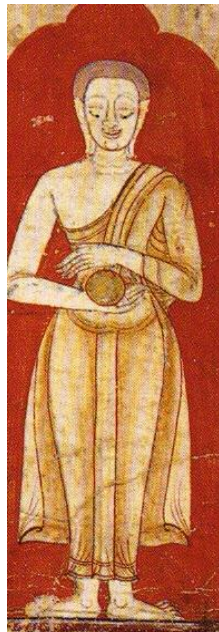


Figure 2.14: Picture of an *arahant* holding a sphere in King Taksin's 1776 Traibhūmi manuscript in the Museum of Asian Art, Berlin (catalogued as II 650) (photograph by

Barend Jan Terwiel).¹⁶⁰

Moreover, the epithet of *nibbāna* as a 'place' is also depicted literally in King Taksin's Traibhūmi drawings (see Terwiel 2014). Both the Bangkok and Berlin manuscripts provide one full-page sermon on *nibbāna* enumerating its physical features: the number of its walls, the gates, the palace, the resting place, the lake with lotus flowers and bees, various birds, etc., and an illustration of it as a city (Terwiel 2014: 47 and 65). As mentioned above, the epithet of *nibbāna* as a place is mentioned in other *borān kammaṭṭhāna* texts: for example, in Saṅgharāja Suk Kai Thuean's biography and Wat Pradusongtham's meditation manual in the Chai Yasothonrat anthology. It is also mentioned in a collection of sermons by the 19th Supreme Patriarch of Bangkok, Somdet Phra Yansangwon (Charoen Suvaḍḍhano), the late abbot of Wat Bowonniwet. However, in Sammā Arahaṃ meditation, although *nibbāna* is described by Luang Pho Sot as an *āyatana* or the dwelling place of *dhammakāyas* of the Buddha and *arahants*, he never conceived it as a physical place or a city, and understood it as an unconditioned, supra-mundane and supra-physical place. None of the physical objects and living things that are made up of the five aggregates and the four elements exist in *āyatana* (*nibbāna*).

The similar aspects in King Taksin's manual and Traibhūmi manuscript include the attainment and the vision of 'the Buddha's *dhamma* sphere' in the area of the navel and the

¹⁶⁰ I would like to thank Achan Barend Jan Terwiel for kindly sending me the picture.

epithet of *nibbāna* as a place. However, there is currently no evidence that Luang Pho Sot came across these texts prior to developing Sammā Arahaṃ meditation. As these two aspects are already present in Suk Kai Thuean's and Wat Pradusongtham's system, and are found in other *borān kammaṭṭhāna* sources, they could have been adopted from these traditions without the need to attribute them to King Taksin.

In *Nibbāna as self or not self: Some contemporary Thai discussions* (Potprecha 2009: 132–138), I made a comparison between the understanding of *dhammakāya* (*dharmakāya*) and self in Sammā Arahaṃ tradition and the Mahāyāna *Tathāgatagarbha* teaching and found a number of similarities between the two. *Tathāgatagarbha* is a stream of thought or a philosophical trend in Mahāyāna Buddhism. It advocates the presence of the *tathāgatagarbha* (embryo of the *tathāgata*) in all beings, which is their potentiality to attain Buddhahood. In Śrīmālādevīsīmhanāda Sūtra, the *tathāgatagarbha* is described as 'neither self nor sentient being, nor soul, nor personality', but when it is liberated from all defilement stores, it becomes *dharmakāya*, which has the perfections of permanence, pleasure, self and purity (Potprecha 2009: 133). These four qualities bear similarities to Luang Pho Sot's description of *dhammakāya* as *niccaṃ* (permanent), *sukhaṃ* (happy), and *attā* (self) and *virāgadhamma* (passionless *dhamma*). In the *Ratnagotravibhāga*, the four qualities are explained as an antidote to the mistakes of those who wrongly apply the Buddha's four remedies of impermanence, suffering, non-self and impurity with the *dharmakāya*, when the *dharmakāya* has the opposite qualities to those. The *dharmakāya*, according to the *Ratnagotravibhāga*, is the 'true self' in the sense that 'all conceptual elaboration in terms of self and non-self is totally stilled' (Potprecha 2009: 133). Moreover,

in the Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra, a *tathāgatagarbha sūtra* of the Mahāyāna tradition, the Buddha's *dharmakāya* is described as the adamantine, indestructible, eternal body, and the body of peace (Page: 1999–2000: 44). The words 'adamantine body' or *vajrakāya* can also be translated as 'diamond-like body' and allude to the vision of *dharmakāya* in Sammā Arahaṇ meditation appearing as bright, translucent and crystal-like. I then connect these similarities to the Tibetan *shentong* (other-empty) school of thought, which interprets these statements as the ultimate truth (Potprecha 2009: 135). This school describes the *tathāgatagarbha* as being synonymous with *dhātu* (element), *gotra* (lineage), *tathatā* (suchness), *paramārthasatya* (ultimate truth/reality), *dharmakāya*, *buddhajñāna* (Buddha's consciousness) and 'Clear Light Nature of Mind', in the sense that they are different aspects of the same ultimate reality (Potprecha 2009: 136). This same reality in an ordinary being is called *tathāgatagarbha* and in the Buddha is called *dharmakaya*, which is endowed with four 'transcendental' qualities as described as the four perfections above: transcendental purity, self, bliss and permanence (Potprecha 2009: 136). The transcendental self is the quality of the uncompounded reality and is called the 'Tathatā Self' or the 'Pure Self' (Potprecha 2009: 136). This understanding of *dharmakāya* being synonymous with the Clear Light Nature of the Mind and having the quality of the transcendental self alludes to Luang Pho Sot's vision of the *dhamma* sphere appearing luminous like the sun and *dharmakāya* as the unconditioned and liberated self (*attā vimutti*).

In making this comparison, I was attempting to contextualize the Thai *nibbāna* as self or not-self discussions in a wider Buddhist context without making any suggestions regarding

the origins of Sammā Arahaṃ meditation. In the light of the above findings and in the absence of any evidence of their presence in Thailand prior to Luang Pho Sot, it is unlikely that in his development of Sammā Arahaṃ meditation, Luang Pho Sot came across and was influenced by *tathāgatagabha* and/or *shentong* ideas.

2.6 The centrality of Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta in Sammā Arahaṃ meditation examined

This part is a survey of meditation practices in Thailand prior to Luang Pho Sot's development of Sammā Arahaṃ meditation in order to better understand his focus on the Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta in the context of pre-modern Thai Buddhist meditation traditions. Newell (2008: 66–7) in her thesis does not acknowledge the significance of the Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta in Sammā Arahaṃ meditation, but only the influence of Saṅgharāja Suk Kai Thuean and the so-called *borān kammaṭṭhāna* tradition. However, I would like to argue that the centrality of the Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta and the four *satipaṭṭhānas* (also termed the Four Foundations of Mindfulness and the Four Frames of Reference) is one aspect that distinguishes Sammā Arahaṃ meditation from *borān kammaṭṭhāna*. Sammā Arahaṃ, in my opinion, is not just a simple and straightforward continuation of *borān kammaṭṭhāna*, but by incorporating Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta and the scheme of the four *satipaṭṭhānas* into its practice, it aims to offer a new take on *borān kammaṭṭhāna*.

It is possible, but unlikely, that Luang Pho Sot came across the Rise and Fall technique prior to his development of Sammā Arahaṃ meditation. As I mentioned above, the 'Rise

and Fall’ or Yup No Phong No meditation system, developed by Mahasi Sayadaw (1904–82), is today the most widely practised Burmese *vipassanā* method in Thailand. It is a form of ‘bare’ or ‘dry’ insight method based on an interpretation of the Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta and Visuddhimagga’s stages of insight knowledge (*vipassanā ñāṇa*), omitting the parts that are regarded as *samatha* (calm or tranquillity) meditation in these texts. There is currently no evidence of this technique being practised and taught in Thailand prior to 1953. The account of Luang Pho Sot’s obtaining of a palm leaf manuscript of the *sutta* in the autobiography and the mention of the *sutta* and the four *satipaṭṭhānas* in his earliest surviving sermons are crucial because they provide evidence that Luang Pho Sot developed Sammā Arahaṃ meditation with the Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta in mind from the very beginning (1916), and not after the introduction of the Rise and Fall method in Thailand.

As I mentioned above, according to the autobiography, Luang Pho Sot obtained the palm leaf manuscript of the Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta at Wat Songphinong shortly after his ordination in 1905. The *sutta* became so significant to Luang Pho Sot that he made it his goal to be able to translate the *sutta* into Thai (63 *sermons* 1984: (3)). Having achieved this in the 11th year after his ordination, he discontinued his Pāli studies and focused solely on meditation practice (63 *sermons* 1984: (3)). His focus on the Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta may be due to his view that the four *satipaṭṭhānas* constitute the ‘only path’ to *nibbāna*, which is derived from one of the several translations of the Pāli expression ‘*ekāyanamagga*’.¹⁶¹ Single manuscripts of Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta and Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta were certainly found

¹⁶¹ *Ekāyanamagga* is Pāli expression, which describes the practice of the Four Foundations of Mindfulness (*satipaṭṭhānas*) in the Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta. It has been variously translated as ‘one way’, ‘sole way’, ‘only path’, ‘direct path’, ‘unified path’ etc.

in Thailand in both Pāli and in the bilingual *nissaya* form prior to Luang Pho Sot. According to the biography of Saṅgharāja Suk Kai Thuean, Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta is one of the texts Saṅgharāja Suk studied in detail while he was in residence at Wat Thahoi, Ayutthaya, during the years leading up to the destruction of the kingdom by the Burmese army in 1767 (Wira 2012: 146). Palm leaf manuscripts of the *sutta* dated from the early nineteenth century are preserved in various collections throughout Thailand. For example, an undated palm leaf manuscript of Pāli Satipaṭṭhāna written in Khom script is kept at Phranakhon Si Ayutthaya Rajabhat University's Ayutthaya Studies Institute, Ayutthaya.¹⁶² Another palm leaf manuscript of Pāli Satipaṭṭhāna dated 1835, written in Tham-Lanna script, is preserved in the Khru Ba Mahāthera Palm Leaf Manuscript Museum collection at Wat Sung Men, Prae province.¹⁶³ In the Mahasarakham University North-Eastern Palm Leaf Manuscript Preservation Project's online catalogue, two sets of undated Pāli Satipaṭṭhāna palm leaf manuscripts written in Tham-Isan script are said to be kept at Wat Wari Udom, Roi Et province.¹⁶⁴ In the Chiang Mai Rajabhat University Centre for Palm Leaf Studies, Language, Art and Culture Institute's online catalogue, four bundles of the text in Lanna script, dated 1918, are found at Wat Namcham, Chiang Mai province.¹⁶⁵ The palm leaf manuscript of Pāli Satipaṭṭhāna Nissaya in Burmese script, dated 1864, is also among the collection of manuscripts that Dr Anatole Peltier gave to Khunying Khaisi Si-

¹⁶² Manuscript catalogue number: 855/25. http://asi.aru.th/?page_id=6273

¹⁶³ Manuscript catalogue number: 01-02-209-01-07.

<http://emuseum.in.th/watsungmen/emuseum/projects/objects/indexzoom.php?objref=e19#!prettyPhoto>

¹⁶⁴ No catalogue number. <http://www.bl.msu.ac.th/gps/index.php>

¹⁶⁵ Manuscript catalogue number: CMRU-CM-06-A-059-3.

http://www.culture.cmru.ac.th/manuscript_database/bailan_dblist.php

arun, and is now kept at Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Anthropology Centre, Bangkok.¹⁶⁶

However, despite the existence of single manuscripts and their translations, the Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta is rarely mentioned in any meditation manuals and teachings in Thailand prior to Sammā Arahaṃ meditation. In this part, I examined all the available Thai meditation texts and teachings prior to Luang Pho Sot's development of Sammā Arahaṃ meditation (1916), such as the manuals in the Chai Yasothornrat anthology, King Taksin's meditation manual and some of the leading Thammayut figures' meditation teachings and found that although some of these texts incorporate practices described in the Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta, such as mindfulness of breath, mindfulness of the body, the ten loathsome (*asubha*) objects etc., they appear to be mentioned among a variety of other practices. The scheme of the four *satipaṭṭhānas*, namely mindfulness established on four objects – 1) body (*kāyānupassanā satipaṭṭhāna*); 2) feelings (*vedanānupassanā satipaṭṭhāna*); 3) mind (*cittānupassanā satipaṭṭhāna*); and 4) *dhammas* (*dhammānupassanā satipaṭṭhāna*) – are not often mentioned in these manuals and teachings, and when they are, they are usually referred to in passing and among a variety of canonical and non-canonical practices. Therefore, according to the evidence currently available, Luang Pho Sot appears to be among the first Thai meditation teachers of his time to incorporate the Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta and the scheme of the four *satipaṭṭhānas* as a central text and practice of his meditation system.

¹⁶⁶ Manuscript catalogue number: SAC001-022.
<http://www.sac.or.th/databases/manuscripts/main.php?m=home&p=index>

Apart from the sermon by the Thammayut monk, Phra Upāli Khunupamachan (Chan Siricando), the abbot of Wat Baromniwat who ordered the compilation of the Chai Yasothonrat anthology, the rest of the anthology is copied or derived from texts composed prior to the nineteenth century. Two of the stated authors, namely Saṅgharāja Suk Kai Thuean (1733–1822) and Saṅgharāja Don (1761–1852), definitely lived from the late Ayutthaya to early Bangkok periods. Saṅgharāja Don was born during the reign of King Ekkathat of Ayutthaya and died in the second year of the reign of King Mongkut. He developed close relationships with Rama II and Rama IV, being appointed the Supreme Patriarch by decree of King Rama II, a position that he held for 20 years, and having taught Rama IV. Wat Pradusongtham’s collection, as discussed above, is dated sometime during the late Ayutthaya period (c. eighteenth century). With regard to the Vientiane texts, Choompolpaisal (2019: 9) thinks that these collections of manuals are based on manuscripts composed from the late seventeenth to early eighteenth centuries. One of its composers, Supreme Patriarch Sutthisomphrammanachan, lived from 1637 to 1714. Somdet Phra Mahawichaithat Rajamahamuni, who composed the second Vientiane collection, is speculated to have lived sometime during the late seventeenth century (Choompolpaisal 2019: 9).

All of the meditation manuals in the Chai Yasothonrat anthology dated prior to the nineteenth century contain no reference to the Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta and hardly any references to the four *satipaṭṭhānas*. Out of 410 pages, there are only two very short mentions of the four *satipaṭṭhānas* in these texts. The Vientiane texts contain only half a

page of explanation of *satipaṭṭhānas* by Phra Mahatheraphutrangsi Bawonmuniyan. Mahatheraphutrangsi does not list *satipaṭṭhānas* under his description of *vipassanā* but talks about it separately after he discusses *jhānas*. He explains *satipaṭṭhānas* as follows. First, the practitioner must be mindful of the body, the feelings, the mind, and wholesome and unwholesome *dhammas* as merely body, feelings, mind and *dhammas* and not grasp them as being, person or self. Then he adds that while being mindful of the body, the practitioner is to recite ‘*kāyo asubho*’, while being mindful of feelings, recite ‘*vedanā dukkhā*’, while being mindful of the mind, recite ‘*cittam aniccaṃ*’, while being mindful of *dhammas*, and recite ‘*dhammā anattā*’, thereby incorporating mantric practice into *satipaṭṭhāna* practice. In the Vientiane text attributed to Somdet Phra Mahawichaithat Rajamahamuni, the Pāli terms of the four *satipaṭṭhānas*, namely *kāyānupassanā satipaṭṭhāna*, *vedanānupassanā satipaṭṭhāna*, *cittānupassanā satipaṭṭhāna* and *dhammānupassanā satipaṭṭhāna*, are used as mantras to cure a ‘dry and swollen throat’ (Chai 1935: 196).

The *Mūlakammaṭṭhāna Rom* text from Wat Methang, Chiangmai, which was added to the 2015 reprint of the Chai Yasothonrat anthology by the Thammayut *nikāya*, mentions the recollections of the Buddha, the Dhamma and the *saṅgha*, and the contemplation of the bodily parts, but does not directly mention the Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta or the four *satipaṭṭhānas* (Thammayuttika 2015: 143–160). The text was composed by Gandhiya Bhikkhu in 1875 but was based on an earlier manuscript by the well-known meditation master Khru Ba Kanchon Thera from Prae (1789–1878). The Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta and the four *satipaṭṭhānas* are not mentioned either in King Taksin’s meditation manual.

The longest explanation of the four *satipaṭṭhānas* in the Chai Yasothonrat anthology is the non-*borān kammaṭṭhāna* text taken from a sermon by the Thammayut monk, Phra Upāli Khunupamachan (1856–1932). He provides a six-page explanation in the first part and a half-page explanation in the second part. In the first part, he provides the same translation of the Pāli expression *ekāyanamagga* as Luang Pho Sot, describing the four *satipaṭṭhānas* as the only path: ‘the path of purity, the end of becoming [*bhava*], the end of rebirths [*jāti*], and the crossing of the flood [*ogha*] of all beings, *satipaṭṭhāna* is the only way.’¹⁶⁷ Phra Upāli Khunupamachan was 28 years Luang Pho Sot’s senior and died before the publication of the Chai Yasothonrat anthology. Therefore, this sermon and its translation of *ekāyanamagga* as the ‘only path’ may have been based on a translation that was prior to Luang Pho Sot’s development of *Sammā Arahaṃ* meditation in 1916. There is nowhere else in this anthology where *satipaṭṭhānas* are described in this way. His explanation appears to be a straightforward summary of the *Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta*. In contrast to how the modern *vipassanā* movements present *satipaṭṭhānas*, Phra Upāli sees them as both *samatha* and *vipassanā* and mentions them in both sections. He gives a long explanation of *satipaṭṭhānas* as part of *samatha* meditation, and then mentions them again in passing in the context of the realm of insight (*vipassanā bhūmi*), which is the traditional position of the *Visuddhimagga*.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁷ ทางความบริสุทธิ์สิ้นภพสิ้นชาติข้ามโอชะของสัตว์ทั้งหลาย สติปัฏฐานทางเดียวเท่านั้น (Chai 1935: 55).

¹⁶⁸ The *Visuddhimagga*’s understanding of the *satipaṭṭhānas* as both *samatha* and *vipassanā* follows from the way it treats *kāyagatāsati*, *ānāpānasati* and *asubha* practices as *samatha*, all of which are topics within the *kāyānupassanā* section of the *Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta*. See, for example, *Vism* 3, 243, 265–7, 275–6, 277, 289–91, 464, 522 and 679–680.

With regard to Saṅgharāja Suk Kai Thuean’s meditation system, although the Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta and the four *satipaṭṭhānas* are not mentioned in his manuals in the Chai Yasothonrat anthology, the *sutta* is said to be among the texts that Saṅgharāja Suk studied and its translation is cited in his biography (Wira 2012: 146–166). The biography, compiled and edited by Luang Pho Wira Ṭhānavīro, the current meditation instructor at Wat Ratchasittharam, does not translate the words ‘*ekāyanamagga*’ as the only path but provides a partial translation of ‘this way is the way that is *eka*’ and interprets it as the path that one has to ‘practise by oneself’, ‘walk by oneself’ and ‘cannot ask others to practise or walk for them’ (Wira 2012: 166).¹⁶⁹ As I shall discuss below, this interpretation is one among the five explanations provided in the Pāli commentaries (Sv III 743–4 and Ps I 229–30). In my interview with Luang Pho Wira, he informs me that the four *satipaṭṭhānas* are very profound teachings and exist only at the highest level of Saṅgharāja Suk’s system, after the practitioner has passed the 13 *samatha* stages and mastered all the eight *jhānas* – a level very rarely achieved among practitioners past and present (Sitthisangwon 2019). At the stage of insight knowledge (*vipassanā ñāṇas*), which precedes the attainment of paths (*magga*) and fruits (*phala*), the 37 factors of enlightenment (*bodhipakkhiyā dhammā*) are developed. These 37 factors are grouped into seven sets of qualities, the first of which are the four *satipaṭṭhānas*.¹⁷⁰ When I asked him why Saṅgharāja Suk’s system does not incorporate the four *satipaṭṭhānas* into the lower levels, Luang Pho Wira explained that

¹⁶⁹ หนทางนี้เป็นที่ไปอันเอก คือทำคนเดียว เดินคนเดียว ให้คนอื่นหาแทนเดินแทนไม่ได้.

¹⁷⁰ The 37 factors of enlightenment (*bodhipakkhiyā dhammā*) are qualities conducive to enlightenment. These qualities are grouped into seven sets: the four foundations of mindfulness (*satipaṭṭhānas*), the four right efforts (*sammappadhānā*), the four bases of supernatural powers (*iddhipādā*), the five spiritual faculties (*indrīya*), the five strengths (*bala*), the seven factors of enlightenment (*bojjhaṅga*) and the eightfold noble path (*ariyamagga*). They are mentioned regularly throughout the Pāli canon. See, for example, Mahāparinibbāna Sutta (D II 100) and Mahā Sakuludāyi Sutta (M II 1).

there is no need to incorporate them as these levels already consist of practices mentioned in the Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta (Sitthisangwon 2019). For example, the fourth level consists of mindfulness of breath, a practice that is included in the mindfulness of the body section of the *sutta*. As one progresses through the different stages, all of the four *satipaṭṭhānas* are practised automatically. However, they are not fully developed until one has attained all the *jhānas* and reached the stage of insight knowledge (Sitthisangwon 2019). With regard to *ekāyanamagga*, Luang Pho Wira states that this translation is in accordance with Saṅgharāja Suk’s understanding and based on the 1788 Buddhist Council’s (*saṅghāyanā*) edition of the Tipiṭaka. The council, convened to carry out a revision and correction of the Pāli canon, was held during the reign of King Rama I (Sitthisangwon 2019).

The Thai Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta edited by Somdet Phra Buddhaghosācāriya (Charoen Nāṇavaro) (1872–1951), the late abbot of the Wat Thepsirin, Bangkok, published in 1919, which is cited in Chapter 2.2, also shares the same understanding of the four *satipaṭṭhānas* as a path be to travelled by oneself. Although it was published three years after Luang Pho Sot’s development of Sammā Arahāṃ meditation, Somdet Phra Buddhaghosācāriya Charoen was 12 years Luang Pho Sot’s senior. This publication is also the sixth edition. Its first edition is most likely to have been published before 1916 and derived from an older translation. It translates *ekāyanamagga* exactly the same as Saṅgharāja Suk’s biography as ‘this way is the way that is *eka*’ and interprets it similarly as ‘the path of a single person’ (Thamtrailokachan 1919: 3).¹⁷¹

¹⁷¹เป็นที่ไปของบุคคลผู้เดียว.

I shall now discuss the meditation teachings of the two most influential Thammayut figures of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, namely Somdet Phra Wannarat (Thap Buddhasiri) (1806–1891) of Wat Sommanat, Bangkok, and Prince-Patriarch Wachirayan Warorot (1860–1921) of Wat Bowonniwet, Bangkok. During his lifetime, Somdet Thap was a highly revered meditation master among the Thammayut *nikāya* reformists and was a close companion of King Mongkut (Rama IV) and a teacher of Prince-Patriarch Wachirayan. Somdet Thap is known for being a member of the first group of monks to be reordained in the Thammayut lineage founded by King Mongkut in 1828, and was among the group of monks who presided over King Chulalongkorn's (Rama V) ordination ceremony in 1875.¹⁷² Somdet Thap excelled in both scriptural studies (he passed the ninth-grade Pāli examination) and meditation. So highly influential were his meditation teachings within the Thammayut *nikāya* that, although over a century old, they are still relatively accessible and have been preserved and taught as part of the monastic curriculum at the Thammayut's Mahamakut Buddhist University up to the present day. Somdet Thap is known as a practitioner of the ten loathsome objects (*asubha*), namely the contemplation of ten different stages of corpses. He formed a close friendship with King Mongkut, often accompanying him into the forest to practise *asubha* on charnel grounds. One of the few surviving photographs of him was taken while he was sitting in meditation contemplating a human skeleton. During his abbotship at Wat Sommanat, Somdet Thap requested artists to paint scenes depicting these practices on the murals of the temple's ordination hall (see Taylor 1993: 42–43).

¹⁷² For a biography of Somdet Thap, see Yukhonthon (1984: 7–14).

From the accounts of two compilations of Somdet Thap's teachings titled *Siri of the Buddha* (Yukhonthon 1984) and *Biography, works and Dhamma sermons of Somdet Phra Wannarat (Thap Buddhasiri Thera)*,¹⁷³ it is clear that Somdet Thap's meditation practice is centred on the three contemplations: the body (*kāyagatāsati*), death (*marañassati*) and the ten loathsome (*asubha*) objects. These three practices are related and can be performed simultaneously while contemplating one's own body or a stage of a corpse. Thus, many of his meditation sermons consist of detailed descriptions of the 32 constituents of the body, their loathsomeness, and the inevitability of death and decay. These descriptions are followed by elaborations on the five aggregates and the three characteristics (*annicaṃ, dukkhaṃ, anattā*). A lengthy elaboration of the *saṅkhāra* aggregate section consists of explanations of each of the 52 *cetasikas*, the mental concomitants that colour the mind. Somdet Thap's teaching can also be characterized as a break away from Thai traditional meditation practices in its exclusive reliance on the Pāli textual tradition eschewing all aspects of the *borān kammaṭṭhāna* tradition, which, at that time, was still a predominant meditation tradition in Thailand. In these two collections, Somdet Thap never mentions the bodily bases, healing practices, sacred syllables, esoteric associations, visions of the sphere, etc.

¹⁷³ สิริแห่งพุทธ. *Siri of the Buddha* was published in Bangkok in 2013. The 150-page book consists of five sections: 1) biography of Somdet Thap; 2) history of Wat Somanat; 3) sermon on *sīla* (precepts); and 4) five sermons on meditation practices. ประวัติ ผลงาน และ รวมธรรมโมชาติ ของ สมเด็จพระวันรัต (ทับ พุทฺธสิริเถร). *Biography, works and Dhamma sermons of Somdet Phra Wannarat (Thap Buddhasiri Thera)* was published in Bangkok in 1986. The book was published on the occasion of Somdet Phra Wannarat (Chap Thitadhamma Thera) the late abbot of Wat Sommanat's 80th birthday anniversary. It is 288 pages long and consists of four sections: 1) two biographies of Somdet Thap (the second one written by Somdet Phra Mahawirawong (Yang); 2) a collection of Dhamma sermons; 3) the biography of Phra Khru Winaithon (who wrote down and published some of Somdet Thap's sermons); and 4) the similarities between Somdet Thap and Somdet Chap's biographies. It is unfortunate that neither of the two books provides the dates that these sermons were given.

Despite completely abandoning *borān kammaṭṭhāna*, the two collections never mention the Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta and rarely mention the four *satipaṭṭhānas*. The three contemplations of the body, death, the ten loathsome objects and the five aggregates are part of the Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta and are explained under the mindfulness of the body and *dhammas* sections, but Somdet Thap never subsumed these practices under the scheme of the four *satipaṭṭhānas*.

In *Siri of the Buddha*'s collection of sermons, consisting of 122 pages, Somdet Thap only mentions four *satipaṭṭhānas* directly once (Yukhonthon 1984: 142). This explanation is short, only two paragraphs. He explains that in order for one's mind to be endowed with merits, one should always be mindful of these four things, namely body, feelings, *citta* and *dhammas* (Yukhonthon 1984: 142). Being constantly mindful of these four objects means that one has established the four *satipaṭṭhānas* in oneself (Yukhonthon 1984: 142). There is no mention of *ekāyanamagga* and/or its translation. In *Biography, works and Dhamma sermons*, out of 235 pages, Somdet Thap provides only a two-page explanation of the four *satipaṭṭhānas* under *sammā sati* or right mindfulness as part of his elucidation of the Eightfold Noble Path (Thap 1986: 271–2). The description is similar to the one above, but more academic in nature, like a summary of doctrine rather than a guideline for meditation practice. Again, there is no mention of *ekāyanamagga* and/or its translation. The little mention of the four *satipaṭṭhānas* and the lack of mention of the *sutta* and *ekāyanamagga* probably mean that Somdet Thap did not view the four *satipaṭṭhānas* as constituting the 'only path' to *nibbāna* and may have understood these contemplations of the body, death,

the ten loathsome objects and the five aggregates similarly to Saṅgharāja Suk's tradition, as automatically conforming to the Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta and the four *satipaṭṭhānas*.

As mentioned in Chapter 2.1, Prince-Patriarch Wachirayan Warorot, the 47th son of King Mongkut (Rama IV), was responsible for the reform of monastic education during the reign of King Chulalongkorn (Rama V, r. 1868–1910). The abbot of Wat Bowonniwet developed the curricula for Pāli and Dhamma studies and wrote many important textbooks, some of which are still part of the monastic curricula today, such as the *Navakovāda (Instructions for newly ordained monks and novices)* and *Vināyamukha (Entrance to the Vināya)*. In 1910, King Vajiravudh (Rama VI, r. 1910–1925) appointed him the tenth Supreme Patriarch of Bangkok, a position he held for 11 years.

From Prince-Patriarch Wachirayan's vast academic output, his longest writing on meditation can be found in *Huachai samatha kammathan (The heart of samatha meditation)* composed in 1912.¹⁷⁴ This work, written to commemorate the death of Phra Panyawisat (Sing), the abbot and meditation instructor at Wat Pathumwanaram, consists of explanations of five objects of *samatha* meditation, namely contemplation of the body (*kāyagatāsati*), loving kindness (*mettā*), recollection of the Buddha (*buddhānusati*), *kaṣiṇas* and analysis of the four elements (*catudhātuvavatthāna*) (Wachirayan 1966: 87–113). These five are among the 40 objects of *samatha* meditation described in the Visuddhimagga.¹⁷⁵ The reason why Prince-Patriarch Wachirayan did not include *vipassanā*

¹⁷⁴ This work was published together with Prince-Patriarch Wachirayan's autobiography and other selected writings in *His autobiography and writings on various topics* (Wachirayan 1966).

¹⁷⁵ See Vism 110.

in this writing may be because he may have viewed *vipassanā* meditation as more appropriate for advanced practitioners than for ordinary readers. In the 26 pages, the work mentions Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta only once in passing. In the analysis of the four elements, Prince-Patriarch Wachirayan (1966: 109) briefly states that this practice is found in the mindfulness of the body (*kāyānupassanā satipaṭṭhāna*) section of the *sutta*. There is no mention of *ekāyanamagga* and/or its translation.

Apart from the section on *satipaṭṭhāna* in Phra Upāli Khunupamachan's sermon in the Chai Yasothonrat anthology, another description of the four *satipaṭṭhānas* as the only path, prior to 1916, is mentioned in the sermon titled 'Phra Rattanatrai' (Triple Gems) by Phra Winairakkhit in a collection of King Mongkut's (Rama IV) writings on Buddhism.¹⁷⁶ The text states that the author, Phra Winairakkhit, is a Thammayut monk ordained by King Mongkut. The reason why his sermon is included within the collection of King Mongkut's writings is most likely because Phra Winairakkhit was a student of the king, and it was assumed that this sermon was a summary of the king's teachings. Nothing else is stated about the author apart from this. The title Phra Winairakkhit is a common monastic title, and without his personal name and ordination name it is very difficult to figure out who he was. The name Winairakkhit is not included in the first batch of Thammayut monks that was ordained by King Mongkut at Wat Bowonniwet. However, this might be because back

¹⁷⁶ พระรัตนตรัย. This sermon is a part of a collection of King Mongkut's writings on Buddhism printed in the cremation volume of Princess Bunchirathon Chuthathut published by Wat Bawon, Bangkok, in 1980. The 98-page volume is made up of two parts: 1) the biography of King Mongkut written by King Chulalongkorn; and 2) King Mongkut's writing on Buddhism, which consists of three texts. The first and the third texts are written by King Mongkut. The second text, the 'Triple Gems', is written by Phra Winairakkhit.

then he was referred to by his ordination name. As a monk ordained by King Mongkut himself, he was most likely a contemporary of Somdet Thap and probably lived most of his life in the nineteenth century.

Of the 25 pages (pp. 61–86 of the cremation volume), the sermon devotes one and a half pages at the beginning, and seven lines on two more pages (pp. 73–75), altogether almost two pages, directly to the four *satipaṭṭhānas*. Phra Winairakkhit also describes the four *satipaṭṭhānas* as the ‘only path’ and equates them with the practice of dwelling with oneself as an island and refuge. He begins the sermon with a Pāli quotation from the beginning of the Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta (D II 290): *ekāyano ayaṃ bhikkhave maggo* [...], translating it as ‘Monks, this is the one and only path’ (Winairakkhit 1980: 61).¹⁷⁷ He explains that both the Buddha and his disciples achieved enlightenment through the cultivation of the four *satipaṭṭhānas*, then quotes from the well-known passage: ‘Monks, be islands unto yourselves, be your own refuge’ and explains that the words ‘island’ (*dīpa*) and ‘refuge’ (*saraṇa*) here also refer to *satipaṭṭhānas*. This description is a reference to at least a couple of places in the *nikāyas* where dwelling with oneself as an island and refuge is explained with reference to the practice of the four *satipaṭṭhānas* (see D III 77, S V 154), and is also similar to Luang Pho Sot’s explanation. As I mentioned above, Luang Pho Sot also equates the practice of the four *satipaṭṭhānas* with dwelling with oneself as an island and refuge. However, Luang Pho Sot’s understanding of the practices extends the scope of mindfulness to the inner bodies, feelings, *cittas* and *dhammas* as well as the human body (see *Compilation of Dhamma sermons* 2012: 53).

¹⁷⁷ มรรคาเอกอันเดียวนี้, literally ‘this *eka* and only *magga*’.

However, despite stating the importance of the four *satipaṭṭhānas* at the beginning, the rest of the article does not focus on them, but on recollections of the Triple Gems (*buddhānussati*, *dhammānussati* and *saṅghānussati*). Phra Winairakkhit states the reason for this: he believes that elaborating on the Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta would not benefit the ordinary reader, but only those who are ‘striving for *nibbāna*’ (Winairakkhit 1980: 68). He therefore chose the more accessible subject of the qualities of the Triple Gems (Winairakkhit 1980: 68). This view of the four *satipaṭṭhānas* being only suitable for more advanced practitioners is similar to that of Saṅgharāja Suk’s tradition. For the rest of the article Phra Winairakkhit focuses on the *iti pi so* formula, and as part of the recollection of Dhamma, he explains each constituent of the Eightfold Noble Path, in which the four *satipaṭṭhānas* are mentioned again briefly under *sammāsaṭi* (Winairakkhit 1980: 73 and 75).

The most interesting part of this article is that for the recollections of the Triple Gems, Phra Winairakkhit incorporates two aspects of *borān kammaṭṭhāna* practices into his sermon. He advises that one should focus one’s mind on one of the three bodily bases – 1) two finger widths above the navel (the same base as Sammā Arahaṃ’s seventh base); 2) the heart base (the middle of the chest); and 3) the throat base – and also recollect the Triple Gems by repeating the three Pāli words: *arahaṃ*, *dhammo* and *supaṭipanno* (Winairakkhit 1980: 76–7):

If one wishes to recollect [the Buddha] concisely in another way, one must repeat in one's mind *arahaṃ arahaṃ* and place one's mind at two fingers above the navel, or the middle of one's chest or at the base of one's neck. Repeat in one's mind *arahaṃ*, with *vitakka* directing the mind, with *sati* recalling, with *vicāra* examining the word: *arahaṃ*, the Buddha's *citta* and character are pure, far from defilements and desire [...]. Recollect the Dhamma's qualities briefly as follows. Repeat in one's mind *dhammo, dhammo*, placing one's mind at two fingers above the navel, having applied thought directing it, mindfulness recalling, and sustained thought examining the word: *dhammo* [...]. Recollect the *saṅgha* briefly as follows. Place one's applied thought, sustained thought and mindfulness in the same way as stated in the recollection of the Buddha. Repeat in one's mind: *supaṭipanno, supaṭipanno*, the noble disciple's *cittas* are endowed with *sīla*, refraining from evil conduct of the body, speech and mind.¹⁷⁸

For most of the article, Phra Winairakkhit seems to be providing the doctrinal descriptions of the qualities of the Triple Gems and, as part of the recollection of Dhamma, the Eightfold Noble Path. However, the above-quoted section, in marked contrast to the rest of the article, seems to be providing a practical guide to the three recollections that is based on *borān kammaṭṭhāna* practices. Here Phra Winairakkhit is probably giving an example based on

¹⁷⁸ ถ้าจะระลึกโดยย่ออีกนัยหนึ่งดังนี้ จงบริกรรมทำในใจว่า อรหุๆ แล้วเอาใจวางลงไว้ที่เหนือศูนย์กลางข้อ ๒ นิ้ว หรือหว่างอกหรือต้นคอ จึงบริกรรมทำในใจว่า อรหุๆ ไป จึงเอวาทกกดใจไว้ เอาสติระลึกไปตามความ เอวิจารพิจารณาไปตามเนื้อความว่า อรหุๆ พระพุทธเจ้า ท่านมีจิตสันดานบริสุทธิ์ ไกลสิ้นจากกิเลสราคะ [...] ระลึกในธรรมคุณสังเขปดังนี้ พึงบริกรรมทำในใจว่า อมโมๆ เอาจิตวางลงไว้ที่เหนือศูนย์กลางข้อ ๒ นิ้ว เอวาทกกดใจไว้ เอาสติระลึกไปตามความ เอวิจารพิจารณาไปตามความว่า อมโม [...] ระลึกถึงสังขตธรรมโดยสังเขป ดังนี้ วิธีที่ตั้งใจวางจิตพิจารณาสติเหมือนกล่าวแล้วในพหุธานุสสติ บริกรรมทำในใจว่า สุปปฏิปนุโนๆ หมูพระอริยสงฆ์สาวก ท่านมีจิตเจตนา ปฏิบัติศีลจนวันขาดจากการประพฤติชั่วในกายวาจาใจ.

his own meditation training (with the bodily bases and mantras). However, being trained as a Thammayut monk, probably by King Mongkut, he chose not to add many aspects to this article but seems to focus more on doctrinal explanations.

His interpretation of the Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta is also different from the Burmese *vipassanā* understanding, as it includes the Eightfold Noble Path and the recollections of the Triple Gems. The Eightfold Noble Path is, of course, mentioned in the Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta as part of the mindfulness of *dhammas*. The recollections of the Triple Gems, however, are not found in the *sutta* but can be interpreted as part of the mindfulness of *dhammas* or understood generally as *sati*. In the last sense, *satipaṭṭhāna* can be extended to include the six *anussatis* as well as *marāṇasati*, *ānāpānasati* and *kāyagatāsati*. As I shall show below, where *satipaṭṭhāna* practice is stated to be the ‘only path’, it is not uncommon to see many types of Buddhist practices interpreted as part of the mindfulness of *dhammas* or regarded generally as *sati*.

In summary, although the practices mentioned in the Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta were incorporated into a number of meditation manuals and teachings prior to Sammā Arahāṇa meditation (1916), the explicit reference to the *sutta* is rarely found. Direct references to the four *satipaṭṭhānas* are not often found, and when they are, they are usually mentioned together with various other canonical and non-canonical practices. For example, Saṅgharāja Suk’s meditation system incorporates the four *satipaṭṭhānas* at the highest level as part of the development of the 37 factors of enlightenment. Therefore, according to the evidence currently available, Luang Pho Sot appears to be among the first Thai meditation

teachers of his time to incorporate the Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta and the scheme of the four *satipaṭṭhānas* as a central text and practice of his meditation system.

Among the four figures who provided translations of the terms *ekāyanamagga*, namely 1) Saṅgharāja Suk Kai Thuean (1733–1822); 2) Phra Winairakkhit (c. nineteenth century); 3) Phra Upāli Khunupamachan (1856–1932); and 4) Somdet Phra Buddhaghosācāriya (Charoen Nāṇavaro) (1872–1951), there seems to be no consensus as to the ‘correct’ translation of the terms as both the ‘only path’ (2 and 3) and the ‘path of a single person’ (1 and 4) readings are equally found. This issue will be explored further in Chapter 2.9.

2.7 Preliminary conclusion

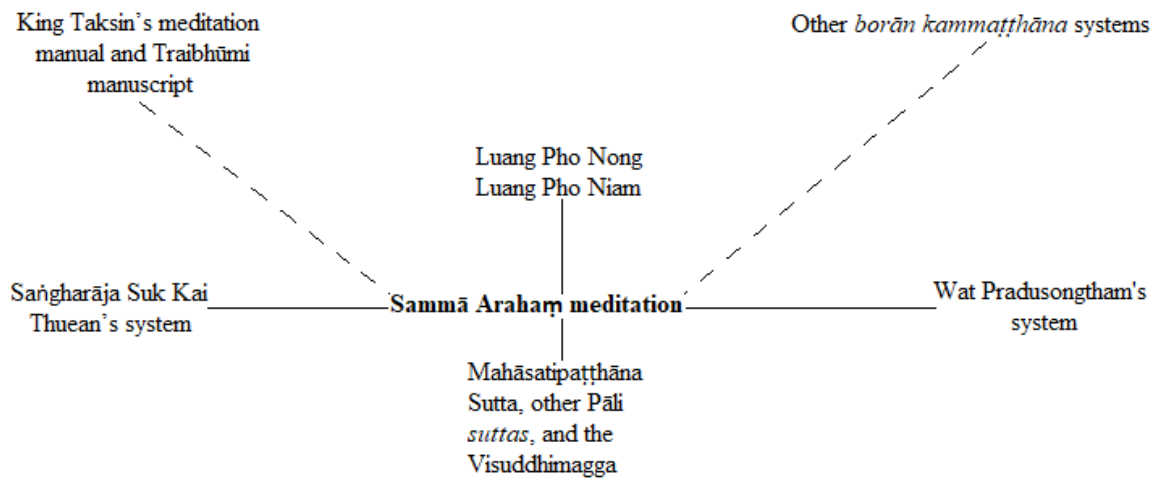


Figure 2.15: Confirmed and possible sources of Sammā Arahaṃ meditation.

The above chart shows all the confirmed and possible sources of Sammā Arahaṃ meditation discussed in this dissertation. The straight lines indicate the four confirmed sources:

1. The Pāli textual authorities, namely Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta, other Pāli *suttas* and the Visuddhimagga. The most influential Pāli text is, of course, the Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta. Other Pāli *suttas* here refer to those cited by Luang Pho Sot in his sermons, for example Ānāpānasati Sutta, Aggañña Sutta, Vakkali Sutta, Mahāparinibbāna Sutta, Udāna 80, etc.
2. Luang Pho Niam Dhammajoti, Wat Noi and Luang Pho Nong Indasuvanno, Wat Amphawan, who were renowned meditation masters of Suphanburi province and Luang Pho Sot's first two meditation teachers.
3. Saṅgharāja Suk Kai Thuean's system or Kammathan Matchima Baep Lamdap: the lineage holder who taught Luang Pho Sot was Phra Sangwaranuwong (Achan Aium) (1831–1913), the third teacher listed in Luang Pho Sot's autobiography.
4. Wat Pradusongtham, Ayutthaya, meditation system as taught by the lay meditation teacher Achan Chap Suwan (1883–1958). Achan Chap Suwan's influence on Luang Pho Sot and Sammā Arahaṃ meditation has been confirmed by Achan Daeng (Prayok Niamnet), the current lineage holder at Wat Pradusongtham.

Their distances from the words Sammā Arahaṃ meditation indicate the extent of their influences on Luang Pho Sot and Sammā Arahaṃ meditation. The nearest to Sammā Arahaṃ meditation, i.e. the Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta and other Pāli texts, exert the most

influence, closely followed by the teachings of Luang Pho Niam and Luang Pho Nong, and Saṅgharāja Suk Kai Thuean’s meditation system. The least influential of the confirmed sources is Wat Pradusongtham’s meditation system, whose confirmed influence overlaps with Saṅgharāja Suk’s influence.

I have also added the two unconfirmed possible sources in the chart, namely King Taksin’s meditation manual and the Traibhūmi manuscript, and other *borān kammaṭṭhāna* systems, indicated by the two broken lines. There is currently no evidence linking Luang Pho Sot to King Taksin’s manual and manuscript. However, I have included them here as possible sources due to their significance and influence, and the proximity of Wat Ratchadathitthan to Wat Pho and other residences of Luang Pho Sot. Other *borān kammaṭṭhāna* systems here refer to the teachings of Luang Pho Sot’s other meditation teachers, for example Achan Sing, Wat Lakhontham, who most likely taught a form of *borān kammaṭṭhāna*.

Sources	Confirmed	Aspects borrowed and adapted
1. Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta, other Pāli <i>suttas</i> and the Visuddhimagga	YES	For example, the scheme of the four <i>satipaṭṭhānas</i> ; mindfulness of breath (<i>ānāpānasati</i>); recollection of the Buddha (<i>buddhānussati</i>); dwelling with oneself as an island and refuge explained with reference to the practice of the four <i>satipaṭṭhānas</i> ; the terms <i>dhammakāya</i> and <i>āyatana</i> ; <i>parikamma nimitta</i> and <i>parikamma bhāvanā</i> ; six <i>vipassanā bhūmis</i> etc.

2. Luang Pho Niam (1828–1909) and Luang Pho Nong (1865–1933)	YES	<i>Kāyagatāsati</i> as extending to one’s inner bodies; seeing one’s inner bodies in comparison with the inner bodies of <i>devas</i> , <i>brahmā</i> and all the noble ones who have died; <i>nibbāna</i> as a <i>deva</i> state higher than <i>brahmā</i> and beyond <i>saṃsāra</i> where one can see and come into contact with the Buddha
3. Saṅgharāja Suk Kai Thuean’s meditation system (Achan Aium, 1831–1913)	YES	Visions of the light spheres; bodily bases; <i>sammā arahaṃ</i> mantra; the term <i>dhamma</i> sphere; and vision of one’s inner body decorated with a crown, a necklace and a breast chain
4. Wat Pradusongtham’s meditation system (Achan Chap Suwan, 1883–1958)	YES	Visions of the light spheres; bodily bases; <i>sammā phra arahaṃ</i> mantra
5. Wat Pradusongtham’s meditation manual	NO	Attainment of <i>dhammakāya</i> in <i>rūpakāya</i> ; <i>dhammakāya</i> as the greatest refuge; <i>dhammakāya</i> equated with a luminescent and inconceivable <i>deva</i>

(eighteenth century)		form and the place of calmness, nobleness and permanence
6. King Taksin's meditation manual (1775) and Traibhūmi manuscript (1776)	NO	The attainment of Buddha's <i>dhamma</i> sphere at the navel; the epithet of <i>nibbāna</i> as a place

Table 2.4: Aspects in the confirmed and possible sources adapted and incorporated into
Sammā Arahaṃ meditation

The above table shows a list of aspects in the confirmed and possible sources, which were and may have been adapted by Luang Pho Sot and incorporated into Sammā Arahaṃ meditation. Wat Pradusongtham's system is here divided into confirmed and unconfirmed aspects. The confirmed aspects refer to those in the system currently practised and taught at Wat Pradusongtham. The unconfirmed aspects refer to those in the eighteenth-century meditation manual *The rooms of buddhagūṇa, dhammagūṇa and saṅghagūṇa*, in the Chai Yasothornrat anthology. As mentioned above, despite being stated by Chai Yasothornrat as originally from Wat Pradusongtham, neither Achan Surat nor Achan Daeng, the two current lineage holders at Wat Pradusongtham, recognized the manual. However, if a future research is able to establish a concrete link between this manual and Luang Pho Sot, the manual will become another significant influence on Sammā Arahaṃ meditation.

References to the Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta, other Pāli *suttas* and the Visuddhimagga as sources are found in Luang Pho Sot's autobiography, his sermons and the biography written by Supreme Patriarch Somdet Pun Puṇṇasiri. Their influences on Luang Pho Sot, especially the Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta, exceed those of other confirmed sources, for if one strips Sammā Arahaṃ meditation of its *borān kammaṭṭhāna* aspects, what is left is essentially the practice of mindfulness of breathing, the recollection of the Buddha and the contemplation of one's body, feelings, mind and *dhammas*, but extended to the inner bodies as well as the human body. The coining of the term '*dhammānupassanā satipaṭṭhāna* sphere' as synonymous with the *dhamma* sphere is the most obvious example of Luang Pho Sot reinterpreting *borān kammaṭṭhāna* practices in terms of the four *satipaṭṭhānas*. Luang Pho Sot takes the vision of the light sphere, which is found in Saṅgharāja Suk's, Wat Pradusongtham's and King Taksin's systems and throughout the *borān kammaṭṭhāna* tradition, and adapts it by linking it to the practice of mindfulness of *dhammas*. The *Dhammānupassanā satipaṭṭhāna* sphere, according to Luang Pho Sot, is seen after bodily, verbal and mental activities are calmed (*kāyānupassanā satipaṭṭhāna*), joy arises (*vedanānupassanā satipaṭṭhāna*) and the *citta* contemplates that joy (*cittānupassanā satipaṭṭhāna*).

The most significant aspect in Luang Pho Niam's and Luang Pho Nong's teachings is their interpretation of *kāyagatāsati* (contemplation of the body). Whilst Luang Pho Niam and Luang Pho Nong interpreted *kāyagatāsati* to include the observation of one's inner bodies in comparison with other beings' and the noble ones' inner bodies, Luang Pho Sot extended that observation to include not just the inner bodies but also the feelings, *cittas* and

dharmas of those inner bodies as well, and thus shifted this practice from *kāyagatāsati*-centred to *satipaṭṭhāna*-centred. With regard to Saṅgharāja Suk's system, the most important aspect is the vision of the meditator's inner body decorated with a crown, a necklace and a breast chain, which became an influence on Luang Pho Sot's understanding of inner *deva* bodies.

As Luang Pho Sot's autobiography states, on the full-moon night of the tenth month, in his 15th year of monkhood (1916), Luang Pho Sot sat in meditation at Wat Botbon Bangkhuwang, a temple in Nonthaburi, and saw the 'real chart of the Buddha' (63 *sermons* 1984: (4)). This account provides another source of Sammā Arahaṃ meditation, namely Luang Pho Sot's own meditative visions and understanding. While Sammā Arahaṃ meditation borrowed elements from various older traditional meditation practices and systems, it does not correspond in any simple or straightforward way to any one particular traditional form. Despite these findings, many aspects are still unique to Sammā Arahaṃ meditation. These include: 1) the 18-body system; 2) the inclusions of the coarse and refined inner bodies; 3) the usage of the terms *dharmānupassanā satipaṭṭhāna*, *sīla*, *samādhi*, *paññā*, *vimutti* and *vimuttiñāṇadassana* to refer to the five inner spheres; 4) the vision of *dharmakāya* as appearing like a translucent Buddha image; 5) the description of *dharmakāya* as permanent, happiness and self (*attā*); and 6) the description of *nibbāna* as an *āyatana*. These aspects could have been developed independently by Luang Pho Sot through his own meditative visions and understanding.

Born in 1884 in the reign of King Chulalongkorn (Rama V) and living in Bangkok and studying at Wat Pho soon after King Chulalongkorn and Prince-Patriarch Wachirayan Warorot initiated the centralizing, modernizing and canonizing reform of the Thai *saṅgha*, Luang Pho Sot would have directly felt the impact of the reform. This may be one of the reasons why, in developing Sammā Arahaṃ meditation, Luang Pho Sot did not mention Luang Pho Niam, Luang Pho Nong, Saṅgharāja Suk Kai Thuean, Wat Pradusongtham or any other meditation systems he had studied as a source or influence, but only what he considered the most important *suttas* of the Pāli canon and the Visuddhimagga. This was probably because Saṅgharāja Suk Kai Thuean's system, as with other traditional forms of meditation, was at that time receiving the negative impact of the reforms. Luang Pho Sot may have felt that referring to any of his teachers' systems, or any other influences, would have been more detrimental than beneficial. It was best to align his meditation system with the Theravāda textual tradition as embodied in the Pāli canon and the Visuddhimagga.

At the same time, I also suggest that, unlike Somdet Phra Wannarat Thap, Luang Pho Sot did not want his system to completely break away from traditional Thai meditation practices. Luang Pho Sot may have decided not to abandon these practices entirely for a number of reasons. Firstly, although at the time these practices were in decline, they were still in Thailand the most prevalent forms of meditation, and ones that he studied for many years. Secondly, he saw and experienced the effectiveness of some of their practices. His teachers and friends who practised and taught these forms of meditation were revered as holy monks and noble ones. This was definitely the case with regard to Saṅgharāja Suk Kai Thuean, as it is clearly stated in his biography that he was a non-returner (*anāgāmi*)

(Wira 2012: 27). Luang Pho Niam and Luang Pho Nong are today revered throughout Suphanburi as *arahants*. Luang Pho Niam is believed to have been taught by the renowned Somdet To (Brahmaramsī) of Wat Rakhang. Luang Pho Sot probably saw in their biographies, teachings and conducts the efficacy of these practices in providing practitioners with the means to attain *nibbāna*. Thirdly, he also saw their worldly applications, such as healing and protective practices, as being useful as well. As I mentioned above, Luang Pho Sot was born and grew up in a province that was considered one of the most dangerous in the country. His decision to become a monk was a result of his father's untimely death and an incident that caused him to fear for his own life. These incidents in the autobiography not only highlight the danger of the lay life but also the political and economic uncertainty of that time. Moreover, during the time of the development of Sammā Arahaṃ meditation, access to modern health care was very limited and expensive, and most people sought out monks and traditional medicine for treatment of diseases. They also sought out amulets and other sacred objects for protection. Luang Pho Sot could have broken away from the traditional forms of meditation altogether, as Somdet Phra Wannarat Thap did, but instead he chose to incorporate these practices into Sammā Arahaṃ meditation because they provided him with the necessary protective and healing skills needed at the time.

Two decades after he developed Sammā Arahaṃ meditation, Field Marshal Plaek Phibunsongkhram allowed the Japanese army to pass through and occupy Thai territory, and in 1942 he declared war against the United States and Great Britain. This alignment with the Japanese forces had disastrous consequences, namely increased taxation and

disruption of Western exports and imports, which led to a commodity shortage and inflation, and subsequently Allied air raids (Wyatt 2003: 248). During this period, the healing and protective techniques proved extremely useful in providing the people of Bangkok, especially the poor, with protection and traditional remedies. As a result, Wat Paknam became a shelter for those who were affected by the bombing during World War II. Achan Tritha (1984: 45–52) states that not only during the war, but also after the war, many casualties still flocked to Wat Paknam, some with serious mental illnesses, and Luang Pho Sot meditated and administered to them with his own concocted remedies.

2.8 The impact of Burmese *vipassanā* traditions on Sammā Arahaṃ tradition

Since the second half of the twentieth century, Thailand has been a witness to the popularization of Mahasi Sayadaw's Rise and Fall meditation method and other Burmese *vipassanā* systems.¹⁷⁹ Their introduction and spread have resulted in the increasing centrality of the view that equates the four *satipaṭṭhānas* (Four Foundations of Mindfulness) with *vipassanā* meditation and the 'only path' to *nibbāna*. As the above section shows, very few of the meditation manuals and teachings prior to Sammā Arahaṃ meditation needed to mention or attempted to conform to the Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta and the four *satipaṭṭhānas* in order to provide what they thought was the most correct form of meditation practice. Out of the four mentions of the terms *ekāyanamagga*, only two, namely the sermons of Phra Winairakkhit, a monk ordained by King Mongkut, and Phra

¹⁷⁹ For further discussions regarding Burmese *vipassanā* and its popularization in Thailand, see, for example, Houtman (1990), Jordt (2007), Cook (2010), Schedneck (2012) and Braun (2013).

Upāli Khunupamachan, the abbot of Wat Baromniwat, translate them as the ‘only path’. Thus, at that time the opinion that the practice in this *sutta* constituted the only path to *nibbāna* was not so widespread in Thailand. However, the popularization of Burmese *vipassanā* has greatly impacted on meditation practices in Thailand, and the pervasiveness of this view among the educated segment of the Thai *saṅgha* and meditation practitioners in Thailand has introduced, for the first time, the common notion that the four *satipaṭṭhānas* constitute the ‘correct’ meditation practice.

There are two main traditions of Burmese *vipassanā*, one associated with Mahasi Sayadaw (1904–82) and another associated with his predecessor, Ledi Sayadaw (1846–1923), both of which were developed to meet the needs of people of the modern world. Mahasi’s technique is the Rise and Fall meditation, a form of ‘bare’ or ‘dry’ insight method based on an interpretation of the Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta and Visuddhimagga’s stages of insight knowledge (*vipassanā ñāṇa*), omitting the parts that are regarded as *samatha* (calm or tranquillity) meditation. In this technique, there is absolutely no *samatha* involved. The concentration (*samādhi*) level employed in this method is only temporary or momentary concentration (*khaṇika samādhi*), i.e. the level of concentration that exists in day-to-day activities such as reading. This meditation method does not require its practitioner to develop *appanā samādhi* (attainment concentration reaching *jhāna*) or even *upacāra samādhi* (access concentration, approaching, but not reaching, *jhāna*). However, its practitioners argue that deeper levels of concentration equivalent to *upacāra samādhi* and *appanā samādhi* can be developed by bare insight meditators as well. However, in contrast to one who practises calm meditation, which develops access and full concentration right

at the beginning, one who practises bare insight develops similar levels of concentration much later (see Mahasi 1994: 5–8).

The practitioners in this tradition are not supposed to recite any mantras, or visualize any object or arrive at any visionary experience. The characteristics of *borān kammaṭṭhāna* are not found in this method. Supernatural powers are also viewed as unnecessary and a distraction. Meditation practice in this tradition also consists of few rituals and liturgical practices, and lay people as well as monastics are encouraged to practise it. The objects of meditation for this method are all mental and material phenomena.¹⁸⁰ The method also introduces various new techniques aimed at aiding the practice of mindfulness such as observing the rise and fall of the abdomen, the body scan, analysing the different phases of taking steps, etc.

The teachers of this school tend to view and describe *samatha* meditation as a method that existed before Buddha, a worldly meditation method, which means that although it produces a lot of merits, leads to *jhānas* and supernormal knowledges and attainments, it does not by itself lead to insight and the ultimate cessation of suffering. However, *vipassanā* meditation is emphasized as a method only taught exclusively in Buddhism and the only way leading to the cessation of suffering and *nibbāna*. As a result, the school's meditation and other teachings tend to bypass *samatha* meditation. For example, the method's reading of the Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta omits the practice of mindfulness of

¹⁸⁰ Theoretically, all objects of insight meditation consist of the five aggregates (*khandhas*), the 12 spheres (*āyatanas*), the 18 elements (*dhātu*), the 22 faculties (*indrīyas*), the Four Noble Truths and the 12 factors of dependent origination (*paṭiccasamuppāda*).

breath, which it sees as *samatha*. Instead it reinterprets the observation of the rise and fall of the abdomen as the mindfulness of the air element. The seventh and eighth factors of the Eightfold Noble Path are right mindfulness (*sammā sati*) and right concentration (*sammā samādhi*). Right mindfulness in this method is interpreted traditionally to mean the four *satipaṭṭhānas*. In relation to right concentration, however, this school does not mention developing concentration through *samatha* meditation leading to *jhānas*, but refers to concentration that is developed through the practice of mindfulness, which leads to insight.¹⁸¹ Moreover, although the school relies on the stages of insight according to the Visuddhimagga, the 40 objects of *samatha* meditation in the Purification of Mind section of the Visuddhimagga are omitted, whereas the stages of insight from the Purification of View onwards are emphasized.

Another well-known insight meditation tradition from Burma is one founded by Ledi Sayadaw. Several meditation lineages acknowledge him as the founding teacher, including the lineage of S. N. Goenka (1924–). According to Braun (2013: 161), Ledi may have been an influence on Mingun Sayadaw, the meditation teacher of Mahasi, and on Mahasi as well. Unlike Mahasi's method, Ledi's method provides an option to practise calm meditation (*samatha*), and mindfulness of breath (*ānāpānasati*) is taught as a precursor to *vipassanā*. However, despite teaching *samatha*, Ledi on occasions encouraged practitioners to skip the development of deep concentration and to begin with the practice of insight. In one of his most influential books, *Manual of insight meditation*, composed

¹⁸¹ With regard to right mindfulness explained in terms of the four *satipaṭṭhānas* and right concentration in terms of the development of *jhānas*, see, for example, Saccavibhaṅga Sutta (M II 248).

for Europeans in 1915, Ledi states that ‘those whose perfection of knowledge is ripened need not cultivate concentration’ and advises the meditator to skip the stages of access concentration (*upacāra samādhi*) and attainment concentration (*appanā samādhi*) and proceed directly to *vipassanā* using momentary concentration (*khaṇika samādhi*) (Braun 2013: 141). According to Braun (2013: 139), ‘Ledi was one of the first teachers in the modern era to offer this approach of pure insight practice as a viable, even preferred option’. In skipping these levels, Ledi, like Mahasi, simplified the traditional practice and opened it up to a much wider audience. Meditation in these two traditions became an everyday practice for the laity. This was done in order to revitalize Buddhism and as a response to the threat of colonialism and Christian proselytization in the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Burma.

Burma has been in contact with the West since at least the fifteenth century, but Buddhism in Burma was radically challenged by the British conquest, which began in 1824 with the annexation of lower Burma and the rest of the country in 1886, 40 years after Ledi was born and 18 years before Mahasi was born. During the period of colonial rule, which spanned over a century from 1824 to 1948, missionaries and colonial officials exercised considerable influence on Burmese religious life (see Houtman 1990: 56). The Burmese Buddhists perceived these events as the beginning of the deterioration of Buddhism. The conquest by a foreign government uninterested in the religion resulted in a decline in governmental support for Buddhism, which was followed by the collapse of monastic unity through sectarian disputes, and the waning of its moral standards (Houtman 1990: 57).

In the case of Thailand, when the threat of colonialism was felt, King Mongkut and King Chulalongkorn reacted by instituting reforms in all sectors of Thai society. The royal reformists adopted European models of progress, culture and world view. During the reign of King Chulalongkorn (Rama V, r. 1868–1910), there emerged a new trend in the study of Buddhism in Thailand, whereby Buddhism began to be studied ‘academically’ and ‘critically’ by the community of royal scholars, and not, as in the past, only for the purpose of religious instruction (Arthid 2012a: 433). According to Arthid (2012a: 434), source materials were no longer restricted to the Tipiṭaka, the commentaries or other Pāli texts, but also included books written or translated by Western and emerging Japanese scholars, and archaeological and inscriptional evidence.

Like his Thai counterparts, Ledi’s thought was also informed by Western and Western-influenced scholars of Buddhism. Ledi’s mentor, Hpo Hlaing (1830–1883), a minister of King Mindon, was deeply engaged with the West, had a library full of Western books and had some of them translated into Burmese. Hpo Hlaing’s book, *Meditation on the body* (*Kāyānupassanā*), drew on Abhidhammic explanation of different parts of the body and compared them with the same parts described in an Italian anatomy textbook (Braun 2013: 32). Similarly, Ledi’s meditation writings also focused on contemplation of the body and attempted to link the Buddhist knowledge with Western anatomical facts (Braun 2013: 33). His emphasis on the Abhidhamma is derived from his belief that it is the most rational and scientific of all Buddhist texts and one that would appeal to non-Buddhists. Ledi corresponded with Westerners throughout his life. In a letter to Caroline Rhys-Davids of the Pali Text Society in 1917, Ledi states that the Abhidhamma philosophy ‘gives delight

to scientific men of other religions’ and can also ‘resist the interference of foreign religions’ (Braun 2013: 81). Mahasi was also aware of Western ideas and criticisms of Burmese Buddhism. He was acquainted with Myin’ Hswei, a medical doctor, and went to see him seeking answers to questions thrown up by his Western medical education and to ones raised by foreigners’ view on Buddhism (Houtman 1990: 62). Among his first Western students was the former British Rear Admiral E. H. Shattock, who went on leave from Singapore to study meditation at Sasana Yeiktha in Yangon in 1952. On his return to England, he wrote a book titled *An experiment in mindfulness*, published in 1958, which describes his trip and experiences in Yangon. In the book, Shattock (1958: 17–18) explains that the reasons he became interested in Mahasi’s method were because it was ‘simple’, ‘could be fitted into a normal daily routine’ and ‘required no philosophical understanding or any particular religious beliefs’. He described Mahasi as being ‘well versed in Western philosophy at least so far as it conflicted with Buddhist thought’ and ‘at home with the idiosyncrasies of Western thought’ (Shattock 1958: 58 and 72).

Both the traditions of Ledi and Mahasi formed bases for the internationalization of insight meditation and its spread to the West (Braun 2013: 162). The well-known American-born meditation teachers Jack Kornfield (1945–), Sharon Salzberg (1952–) and Joseph Goldstein (1944–) were trained in Mahasi’s method. Kornfield practised it at the Mahasi Centre in Yangon, and both Goldstein and Salzberg in India under Munindra, a pupil of Mahasi. These teachers all emphasize the bare insight practice and dispense with rituals, and supernatural and cosmological aspects of traditional meditation. Goenka, a pupil of U Ba Khin (1899–1971), started teaching meditation in India in 1969. His famous ten-day

retreats, popular among Westerners, spread throughout India and later to the rest of the world. Currently, his organization consists of over 120 meditation centres in every continent. It promotes bare insight as the heart of the Buddha's teaching and as a universal practice for all religious adherents.

The 'bare insight' method as developed by Mahasi Sayadaw (1904–82) is known in Thailand as the Rise and Fall or *Yup No Phong No* method, a name taken from its basic technique of observing the rising and falling of one's abdomen. It was first introduced in Thailand in 1952 at Wat Mahathat, Bangkok, and since then has become one of the most popular and widely practised meditation methods in Thailand.¹⁸²

The two monks largely responsible for the introduction of Mahasi's meditation method at Wat Mahathat, Tha Phrachan, Bangkok are Phra Thamthiraratmahamuni (Achan Chodok Ñāṇasiddhi) (1918–88) and Somdet Phra Phuthachan (At Āsabhamahāthera) (1903–89) formerly known as Phra Phimontham. Somdet At was a Pāli scholar and a high-ranking Buddhist monk who had an interest in insight meditation.¹⁸³ In 1948, Somdet At met the Burmese ambassador to Thailand and discussed with him the possibility of international exchanges. This resulted in the Burmese Buddhist Assembly sending two monks, Saddhammajotika Dhammācāriya and Techinta Dhammācāriya, to teach the Abhidhamma in Bangkok in 1949, and Somdet At sending Achan Chodok to study meditation with Mahasi at Sasana Yeiktha in Yangon, Burma, in 1952, for one year (Phimontham Institute

¹⁸² See Cook (2010: 26–35) and Schedneck (2012: 119–124).

¹⁸³ A biography of Somdet At can be found on the website of the Phimontham Institute, Mahachulalongkorn Buddhist University, Khonkaen region: <http://202.28.110.166/pimoldham>

n.d.). When Achan Chodok returned from Burma he invited two Burmese monks, Bhaddanta Āsabhamahāthera, who also taught and examined Achan Chodok, and Indavaṃsa Kammaṭṭhānācāriya to teach this meditation method at the temple (Phimontham Institute n.d.). Subsequently, Mahasi's method was promoted as part of the curriculum at Wat Mahathat and Mahachulalongkorn Buddhist University, and became the normative meditation for temples and institutions affiliated with Mahachulalongkorn.

In Achan Chodok's biography, he is cited as saying that prior to his trip to Burma, he received meditation training at Wat Rakhang, Thonburi, under Phra Phawanaphiram, which he describes as '*samatha*' (Young Buddhists Association of Thailand 2008: 26). It consisted of a visualization of the Buddha image and reciting the word '*Buddho*' (Young Buddhists Association of Thailand 2008: 26).

Achan taught me a *samatha* method of bringing the Buddha inside, by concentrating on the Buddha image from the hair, the head, the face, the hand to the rest of the body, and reciting the word '*Buddho, Buddho, Buddho*' with my eyes shut, until the mind has *samādhi*; then, bringing the mental image of the Buddha to dwell on the right hand, right shoulder, inside the head and two fingers above the navel. But I was not satisfied with the results. (Young Buddhists Association of Thailand 2008: 26)

The meditation method briefly summarized by Achan Chodok contains a *borān kammaṭṭhāna* characteristic in identifying one's physical body with the Buddha, and bears

similarities to Luang Pho Niam's and Luang Pho Nong's method in its emphasis on the bodily bases and the vision of a Buddha image in meditation. The position of two finger widths above the navel is the same position as the seventh position in Sammā Arahaṃ meditation, the dwelling place of the *dhamma* sphere; and the mantra '*buddho*' is also used in Achan Man forest meditation tradition. Furthermore, it is not a coincidence that this method echoes the practice described in the Jinapañjarakāthā, which evokes past Buddhas and *arahants* to dwell at various places of the body to offer protection. Jinapañjarakāthā's popularization has been attributed to Somdet To, the former abbot of Wat Rakhang. I suggest that the method that Achan Chodok practised at Wat Rakhang had been handed down from Somdet To himself, who had adapted it from Saṅgharāja Suk Kai Thuean's method, and maybe used it in conjunction with reciting the Jinapañjarakāthā. Nevertheless, Achan Chodok and Somdet At were not satisfied with this method. Somdet At's dissatisfaction was recorded in a conversation with Phra Phawanaphiram, in which the meditation teacher admits to Somdet At to having tried and failed to reach stream attainment (Young Buddhists Association of Thailand 2008: 60). Thus, Somdet At made the decision to travel to Burma with Achan Chodok in order to seek a meditation technique that was unique to the Burmese and different from the ones already popular in Thailand.

Of all the techniques prevalent in Burma at the time, both Somdet At and Achan Chodok found the method taught by Mahasi to be the most interesting as it claims to be based on the Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta (Cook 2010: 27). Somdet At was looking for a generalized approach that did not require a method specific to a personality type and found this 'bare' or 'dry' insight method, without the practice of *samatha*, especially appropriate for the laity

as they could practise at home without supervision (Schedneck 2012: 121). Somdet At believed that practising *samatha* without supervision was dangerous as it could lead to supernatural powers (Schedneck 2012: 121). Achan Chodok also considered Mahasi to be a monk of great learning and believed that he had attained ‘the Supreme Dhamma’ (Young Buddhists Association of Thailand 2008: 22). As I mentioned above, the method’s uniqueness lies in its reading of the Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta and the Visuddhimagga and the omission of certain aspects of traditional meditation practices deemed incompatible with modern practitioners. According to Saṅgharāja Suk’s tradition, the four *satipaṭṭhānas* can only be fully developed when one has mastered all the eight *jhānas* through the practice of *samatha* meditation. In Sammā Arahaṃ meditation, the four *satipaṭṭhānas* are first practised when one has achieved the vision of the *dhamma* sphere, which occurs simultaneously with the attainment of the first *jhāna*. In skipping *samatha* meditation, rituals, liturgical and protective practices, Mahasi, like Ledi, simplified the traditional practice and opened it up to a much wider audience. Although terms that the practitioners of this school equate with ‘bare’ or ‘dry’ insight are mentioned in the Pāli canon, the Visuddhimagga and the commentaries, nowhere do these texts prescribe the practice as suitable for everyone, nor do they suggest that the *samatha* is unnecessary and a distraction. There are many places in the Pāli canon where the Buddha encourages his disciples to develop *samatha* and *jhānas*. In the Diṭṭhadhamma Nibbāna Sutta (A IV 454), the Buddha even refers to the four *jhānas* figuratively as a kind of *nibbāna* here and now. Thus, in omitting *samatha* and other traditional practices, and regarding them as unnecessary, this method contains the ‘ulimatist’ characteristic, which Cousins (1996: 39) defines as ‘the

perennial tendency [...] to emphasize the highest levels of wisdom or enlightenment and discard more elementary levels’.

When Achan Chodok returned to Thailand in 1953, Somdet At set out to propagate the Rise and Fall method all over the country (Phimontham Institute n.d.). In 1955, he asked the Ecclesiastical Cabinet to set up a Division of Meditation in Thailand. This proposal was given approval and Wat Mahathat became the Central Office for this division with Somdet At as the director. When Somdet At became the president of Mahachulalongkorn Buddhist University, which is situated within the grounds of Wat Mahathat, he established in 1981 a Meditation Institute, which specialized in this meditation method. He set up a number of provincial meditation centres and sent monks who had completed the meditation programme at Wat Mahathat to teach there (Phimontham Institute n.d.).

Thanks to the support of Somdet At and Mahachulalongkorn Buddhist University, the meditation method spread throughout Thailand. Achan Chodok taught this meditation method at Wat Mahathat throughout his life. He became the deputy abbot and the chairman of the Sangha Committee in charge of administering the temple. His other duties included teaching at Mahachulalongkorn Buddhist University and establishing the Mahachulalongkorn Buddhist University Press in Bangkok.

Achan Chodok had numerous students, some of whom became famous meditation masters of this tradition: for example, Phra Khru Phawanawisit (Sisuwān Sirisuvāṇṇo), the abbot of Wat Daen Sa-ngop Asapharam, Nakhon Ratchasima Province. This method is also

propagated by the Young Buddhists Association of Thailand, which has headquarters in Bangkok, and branches in Pathum Thani, Chumphon, Ayutthaya and Rayong. The association was founded in 1949 but subsequently became the centre of the Rise and Fall method thanks to the charismatic leadership of Khun Mae Siri Karinchai, a renowned female lay meditation master. Her meditation courses are also taught at Wat Intharawihan, Bangkok. Other teachers in this tradition include Phra Thamsinghaburachan or Luang Pho Charan, the abbot of Wat Amphawan, Singburi, a well-known Dhamma teacher and meditation master who taught at Wat Amphawan and established a branch at Suan Weluwan meditation centre in Khon Kaen. Princess Mother, the mother of King Bhumibol (Rama IX), took an interest in this method and went to Wat Mahathat to study with Achan Chodok in 1955 for a month. Moreover, Bhaddanta Āsabhamahāthera, who came to Thailand with Achan Chodok, also established a meditation centre called Wiwekasom in Chonburi, which has a branch called Sommit-Prani in the same province.

The spread of the new meditation method had an impact on meditation practices in Thailand in various ways. Firstly, the Rise and Fall tradition claims that its method provides *vipassanā* and not *samatha* technique and adheres most closely to the Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta, and is thus superior to other existing methods. Secondly, the view that the four *satipaṭṭhānas* constitute the ‘only path’ to *nibbāna*, already present in Thailand, became even more widespread as the Rise and Fall tradition gained more and more influence and popularity. As I mentioned in Chapter 2.7, among the four figures who provided translations of the expression *ekāyanamagga* prior to Sammā Arahaṃ meditation (1916),

there seems to be no consensus as to the ‘correct’ translation of the expression as both ‘the only path’ and ‘the path of a single person’ are equally found.

Sources	Translations and interpretations of <i>ekāyanamagga</i>
1. Saṅgharāja Suk Kai Thuean (1733–1822); prior to the Thammayut reform	‘This way is the way that is <i>eka</i> ’; ‘the path that one has to practise by oneself, walk by oneself, and cannot ask others to practise or walk for them’
2. Phra Winairakkhit (c. nineteenth century), a monk ordained by King Mongkut; Thammayut	‘This is the one and only path’; ‘the Buddha and his disciples achieved enlightenment through the cultivation of the four <i>satipaṭṭhānas</i> ’
3. Phra Upāli Khunupamachan (Chan Siricando) (1856–1932); Thammayut	‘Only way’; ‘the path of purity, the end of becoming and rebirth, and the crossing of the flood’
4. Somdet Phra Buddhaghosācāriya (Charoen Nāṇavaro) (1872–1951); Thammayut	‘This way is the way that is <i>eka</i> ’; ‘the path of a single person’
5. Somdet Phra Wannarat (Heng Khemacārī) (1882–1943); Mahānikāya	‘The path that leads to the peace that is <i>eka</i> ’; ‘the path that is <i>eka</i> ’; and ‘the path of purity that is <i>eka</i> ’

6. Luang Pho Sot (1884–1959); Mahānikāya	‘The only path’; ‘the one way without two, without a second way’
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Table 2.5: References to *ekāyanamagga*, its translations and interpretations prior to the introduction of the Rise and Fall method to Wat Mahathat

The above table shows references to *ekāyanamagga*, its translations and interpretations prior to the introduction of the Rise and Fall method to Wat Mahathat. As it is prior to 1953, I have also added two more figures to this list, namely Luang Pho Sot (1884–1959) and Somdet Phra Wannarat (Heng Khemacārī) (1882–1943). Somdet Heng was a Pāli scholar and the abbot of Wat Mahathat, Bangkok, from 1923 to 1943. He died ten years before the introduction of Rise and Fall to his temple. In a collection of ten sermons by various Thammayut and Mahānikāya monks published in 1925,¹⁸⁴ Somdet Heng’s sermon titled ‘Satipaṭṭhānapāṭha’ provides three partial translations of *ekāyanamagga*: ‘the path that leads to the peace that is *eka*’, ‘the path that is *eka*’ and ‘the path of purity that is *eka*’ (Sawetanan 1925: 64 and 71).¹⁸⁵ It is clear that the words ‘peace’ and ‘purity’ here refer to the attainment of *nibbāna* and the word *eka* can be translated as the ‘highest’ or ‘foremost’.

Among the six figures who provided translations and interpretations of the terms *ekāyanamagga* prior to Rise and Fall at Wat Mahathat, there is still no consensus as to the ‘correct’ translation of the terms as the ‘only path’ is found among other translations and

¹⁸⁴ The sermon is part of a cremation volume compiled and edited by the Sawetanan family and published in 1925. The volume consists of ten sermons by various monks given at the funeral rites of Phraya Aphichit Chanyut. ‘Satipaṭṭhānapāṭha’ is the eighth sermon in the volume (pp. 65–73) and was given when Somdet Heng held the monastic title of Phra Thamtrailokachan.

¹⁸⁵ 1. มรรคทางดำเนินถึงความสงบอย่างเอก 2. มรรคทางอันเอก 3. มรรคหนทางแห่งความบริสุทธิ์อย่างเอก.

interpretations. With Somdet Heng translating them as ‘the path that leads to the highest peace/purity’, it is most likely that the ‘only path’ translation was not taken up by monks at Wat Mahathat until the arrival of Rise and Fall. The ‘only path’ is also not confined to one lineage, as two figures in Thammayut (Phra Winairakkhit and Phra Upāli Khunupamachan) and one in Mahānikāya (Luang Pho Sot) adopted this translation.

After the introduction of the Rise and Fall method to Wat Mahathat in 1953, however, the view that the four *satipaṭṭhānas* constitute the ‘only path’ to *nibbāna* seems to have become much more prevalent. In a book titled *Questions and answers regarding vipassanā meditation*, Achan Chodok, following Mahasi, states that the practice of *satipaṭṭhānas* as prescribed in the Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta is ‘synonymous with *vipassanā* meditation’ and the ‘only path’ to *nibbāna* (Thamthiraratmahamuni 2006: 19). When the founder and head teacher of this tradition in Thailand asserted this view, other teachers and practitioners of this tradition adopted it and there followed similar statements in the publications of Mahachulalongkorn Buddhist University and the meditation books written by teachers and students of this school.¹⁸⁶

Another influential figure in the Rise and Fall tradition who is also responsible for propagating this view in Thailand and the rest of the Theravāda world was Nyānaponika Thera. Nyānaponika Thera (1901–94) was a German-born Theravāda monk, ordained in Sri Lanka in 1936, the co-founder of the Buddhist Publication Society and a teacher of contemporary Western Buddhist leaders such as Bhikkhu Bodhi. In 1952, he participated

¹⁸⁶ For example, at Mahachulalongkorn Buddhist University (1995: 338; and 2012: 148).

in the Fifth Buddhist Council in Yangon and at the conclusion of the council remained in Burma to study the Rise and Fall method under Mahasi. His most influential book, *The heart of buddhist meditation*, first published in 1962, and based on his training in the bare insight method, has been reprinted many times, translated into more than ten languages and is a prescribed text in many universities' programmes. In several places in the book, Nyānaponika (2005: 7, 25, 153, 211 and 212), following Mahasi, refers to *satipaṭṭhāna* as the 'sole way' and the 'only way'. He explains that this statement derives from the Pāli expression '*ekāyanamagga*' found in the Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta and means that apart from *satipaṭṭhāna* 'there is no other road that leads to *nibbāna*' (Nyānaponika 2005: 212). The Thai translation, first published in 1985 and reprinted for the eighth time in 2010, also translates them as the 'only way' and offers the same explanation of '*ekāyanamagga*'. In the preface to the book, Chan Suwanwiphat, the translator, states that he consulted Somdet Phra Buddhaghosācāriya (Prayudh Payutto), who wrote a preface and helped him edit the translation (Nyānaponika 2010: 14). The eighth edition also contains a preface by Sulak Sivaraksa, the well-known scholar, activist, follower of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu and founder of the Sathirakoses-Nagapradeepa Foundation. Although Phra Payudh approves the translation and explanation of the 'only way' in *The heart of buddhist meditation*, in his own *Buddhadhamma* he does not translate '*ekāyanamagga*' as the 'only way' but offers a partial transliteration of '*thang ni pen makha ek*'¹⁸⁷ or 'this way is the *eka magga*', and no explanation regarding the term (Payutto 1999: 810). A similar partial transliteration is also found in Bhaddanta Āsabhamahāthera's book (2009: 31), which offers '*thang ni pen thang*

¹⁸⁷ ทางนี้เป็นมรรคาเอก.

pai an ek’, literally meaning ‘this path is the path of going that is *eka*’.¹⁸⁸ ‘*Ek*’ in Thai is an ambiguous word that has several definitions, namely ‘one’, ‘first’, ‘main’ and ‘leading’, and can be interpreted as ‘highest’, as in the Thai for doctoral degree (*parinya-ek*). However, it can also mean ‘only’ and readers who are familiar with the ‘only path/way’ interpretation would understand it this way. Some books, for example *Thang Ek*, by a well-known *vipassanā* meditation teacher, Achan Pramot Pāmojjo (2012: 4–5), offer ‘*thang ek*’ or ‘*eka way*’ as a translation and then explain that this means that *satipaṭṭhāna*, i.e. *vipassanā* meditation, is the ‘only path’. The 19th Supreme Patriarch of Bangkok, Somdet Phra Yansangwon (Charoen Suvaddhano), the late abbot of Wat Bowonniwet (1912–2013), perhaps following his Thammayut predecessors like Phra Upāli and Wat Mahathat, in a sermon given in 1962, also describes the four *satipaṭṭhānas* as the ‘only path’ (Yansangwon 2014: 19).¹⁸⁹

Despite its ubiquity, some modern Buddhist Studies scholars suggest that the word ‘only’ is a mistranslation. For example, Gethin (2001) argues that describing *satipaṭṭhāna* as ‘*ekāyanamagga*’ was not originally intended to indicate that the method of practice was the one and only way, nor was it taken as meaning this by the commentaries. The Pāli commentaries provide five explanations for this term: as ‘a single path, and not a forked path’; a path that is ‘to be travelled alone’; the path of ‘the one’, namely the Buddha; a path that ‘occurs or is found in just one place’, i.e. in Buddhism; and a path that ‘goes to one

¹⁸⁸ ทางนี้เป็นทางไปอันเอก.

¹⁸⁹ This description is mentioned in a compilation of his meditation teachings titled *Guide to the practising of the Four Foundations of Mindfulness*, published in 2014.

place only’, i.e. *nibbāna* (Gethin 2001: 60–1).¹⁹⁰ He argues that the use of *ekāyana* in Pāli and Sanskrit literature suggests that the first explanation of a single path, and not a forked path, does not suggest a sole and exclusive path but that ‘the path is unified, clear, well defined and single – not confusing and difficult to follow as a result of forks and side roads’. He suggests a translation of this passage as ‘going straight to the one is this path for the purification of beings’ (Gethin 2001: 64). According to him, it is clear that the commentaries do not favour the interpretation of ‘only’, and that in opting for this interpretation the modernists are departing from tradition. Anālayo (2003: 28) also thinks that ‘only’ is not a correct translation and translates *ekāyanamagga* as ‘the direct path’. He states that *ekāyano* conveys a sense of directness rather than exclusiveness and adds that the translation of ‘direct path’ fits well with the final passage of the *sutta*, which mentions *satipaṭṭhānas* ‘potential to lead to the highest stages of realization within a limited period of time’.

An obvious question arises: if the four *satipaṭṭhānas* are the only path to *nibbāna*, what of the other teachings and practices mentioned by the Buddha in the Tipiṭaka? Are they to be regarded as redundant? Nyānaponika Thera (2005: 212) explains that this is not so, as all factors of the Eightfold Noble Path are ‘comprised in’ *satipaṭṭhāna* and ‘cannot exist without it’. A similar but more detailed discussion is found in the book *Buddhaviṇṇaṇā* by Sawet Piamphongsan (1909–2002).¹⁹¹ Sawet was a deputy prime minister and minister of finance who became interested in *vipassanā* meditation. After attending the meditation

¹⁹⁰ Sv III 743–4 and Ps I 229–30.

¹⁹¹ Published in Bangkok in 1960 by the Wat Mahathat Vipassanā Foundation.

programme at Wat Mahathat in 1955 for a month, Sawet was approached by Somdet At and asked to write this book. In the first chapter, Sawet attempts to offer an answer as to how the first five disciples of the Buddha (*pañcavaggiya*) were able to achieve stream attainment and arahatship after listening to his discourses and without having to practise or even listen to the Buddha's explanation of *satipaṭṭhānas*. He explains that although the four *satipaṭṭhānas* were not imparted to the five disciples directly, they were able to understand its content, which the Buddha subtly inserted into his first discourse, the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta, and the Discourse on Not-Self, the Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta, as the teachings of the noble Eightfold Noble Path and the three characteristics are contained within the practice of the Four Foundations of Mindfulness. After hearing the discourses, they were able to put them into practice and achieve stream attainment and arahatship (Sawet 1960: 83–4). This explanation coincides with the elucidation given by the renowned *vipassanā* teacher Achan Naeb Mahaniranonda (1897–1983).¹⁹² In lectures given in 1965 and 1966 to the Thailand Buddhist Association, Bangkok, Achan Naeb concluded that the practice of morality, concentration and wisdom, i.e. the content of the Eightfold Noble Path, must consist of *satipaṭṭhānas* as objects (Naeb 2010: 171). With regard to morality, in observing the body with mindfulness, one is practising morality by preventing the coarse defilements arising through bodily action and speech (Naeb 2010: 26). Therefore, in order to explain the 'only path', these teachers subsume the most important teachings of the Buddha into the practice of *satipaṭṭhānas* (Naeb 2010: 26).

¹⁹² Achan Naeb is a 'bare insight' meditation teacher and a student of the Burmese meditation master Bhaddanta Vilāsa who was a student of U Chan Dun, who was in turn a student of Mingun Sayadaw. Her method is similar to Rise and Fall but emphasizes identifying and observing the impermanence of 'name and form' (*nāma-rūpa*).

Interestingly, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu does not solve the ‘only path’ puzzle in this way. In a lecture given in 1960, he did not equate the ‘only path’ with the Four Foundations of Mindfulness but reinterpreted it as referring to the Eightfold Noble Path, which has ‘*samādhi bhāvanā*’ or ‘the training of the mind’ as an important factor (Buddhadasa 2008: 159–62). Nevertheless, all of the above teachers assume without question that *ekāyanamagga* means ‘only path’.

From all the publications surveyed, the only Thai meditation master who did not interpret *ekāyanamagga* as ‘only path’ was Luang Pho Charan, the abbot of Wat Amphawan, Singburi. In the book *Kot haeng kam thamma patibat lem 10 (Law of karma and Dhamma practice)*, Volume 10, Luang Pho Charan argues, contradicting his teacher, Achan Chodok, that *ekāyanamagga* refers to one out of many paths (Phra Ratchasutthiyanmongkhon 1996: 456).¹⁹³ He explains that while other paths are ‘rough, full of holes and other obstacles’, *satipaṭṭhānas* are described as ‘*thang ek*’ (*eka* way) because they are ‘the most convenient path from the start to the end and do not contain any obstacles’ (Phra Ratchasutthiyanmongkhon 1996: 456). However, Luang Pho Charan does not state what the other paths refer to. This explanation is similar to Gethin’s understanding of the first commentarial explanation as described above.

In my opinion, the introduction, spread and popularization of the Rise and Fall method have resulted in a prevalent view of what constitutes the ‘correct’ meditation practice. This view equates *satipaṭṭhānas* with *vipassanā* meditation and the ‘only path’ to *nibbāna*. Its

¹⁹³ กฎแห่งกรรม ธรรมปฏิบัติ เล่ม10.

increasing pervasiveness among the educated members of the *saṅgha* and meditation practitioners has caused an unprecedented tension between this tradition and other meditation traditions in Thailand. This tradition's opposition to Sammā Arahaṃ meditation was most evident when, between March and April 1955, Achan Chodok went to Wat Paknam to teach Luang Pho Sot the Rise and Fall method. Luang Pho Sot was 71 years old at the time and had been teaching Sammā Arahaṃ meditation for almost four decades. In Achan Chodok's biography, it is stated that Achan Chodok was invited to teach Luang Pho Sot, who is described as the 'renowned master of *samatha* meditation', at Wat Paknam for one month. After he had finished training, Luang Pho Sot went to Wat Mahathat to listen to Achan Chodok's lecture on the stages of *ñāṇas* (insight knowledges), and as a gift for Wat Mahathat, Luang Pho Sot signed a photograph of himself with a written statement that 'he has been practising Wat Mahathat's *vipassanā* method and confirms that it is all in accordance with the Mahāsatipatṭhāna Sutta' (Young Buddhists Association of Thailand 2008: 38–39). The written statement is dated 20 April 2498 (1955). The explanations of the two traditions regarding this incident diverge substantially. According to the Rise and Fall tradition, having completed his training, Luang Pho Sot abandoned Sammā Arahaṃ meditation for the Rise and Fall method, but because of his age, he did not get the chance to teach the Rise and Fall method. However, the Sammā Arahaṃ tradition claims that the invitation was the result of Luang Pho Sot not wanting to upset Somdet At, who was, at that time, the ecclesiastical minister directly in charge of Wat Paknam and Luang Pho Sot, and Achan Chodok. Luang Pho Sot did not want to argue with them and create tensions between Wat Paknam and Wat Mahathat, so he allowed Achan Chodok to instruct him. The signed photograph and the written statement were merely a symbol of the harmony

between the two temples. Afterwards, Luang Pho Sot continued to practise and teach Sammā Arahaṃ meditation until the end of his life (Singhon 2008: 120–21; and Sermchai 2015).

One of the few people whose account could provide the least biased clarification of this controversy is *Bhikṣuṇī* Voramai Kabilsingh (1908–2003).¹⁹⁴ Achan Voramai was the first Thai woman to receive ordination from both the male and the female *saṅgha*. She founded Thailand's first *bhikṣuṇī* temple, Songdhammakalyani monastery in Muang District, Nakorn Pathom, and became the monastery's first abbess. Throughout her life, Achan Voramai practised and taught both Sammā Arahaṃ and Rise and Fall along with three other methods. She learned Sammā Arahaṃ directly from Luang Pho Sot having 'attained *dhammakāya*' on 22 March 1954 (Voramai 2003: 110). A year later, on 30 May 1955, one month after Luang Pho Sot had finished his Rise and Fall training, Achan Voramai went to Wat Mahathat to study the Rise and Fall method under Phra Palat Thuan and Achan Thiap (Voramai 2003: 121). After she completed the 28-day course at Wat Mahathat, she went to Wat Paknam to visit Luang Pho Sot, who enquired whether she had managed to retain her *dhammakāya* while practising Rise and Fall. She informed him that while she was studying the method, she only used her human body to meditate, and had placed her *dhammakāya* at the top of her head so that her *dhammakāya* would not disappear during her training (Voramai 2003: 217).¹⁹⁵ Luang Pho Sot was pleased with her answer and

¹⁹⁴ วรไมย์ กบิลสิงห์. The autobiographical accounts are taken from วิปัสสนา ๕ แบบ *Wipatsana 5 baep* (*Five types of vipassanā*) published in 2003.

¹⁹⁵ In Sammā Arahaṃ meditation, those who have reached *dhammakāya*, but have not abandoned the three lower fetters (*saṃyojana*) and become stream-enterers (*sotāpanna*), are called *gotrabhū* persons. *Gotrabhū* persons can fall back on their attainments and become ordinary persons (*puthujjana*) (Sermchai 2017).

instructed her to always ‘maintain her *dhammakāya*’, for it is something that ‘cannot be bought’, ‘even if one has 10,000 or 100,000 [baht]’ (Voramai 2003: 217).¹⁹⁶

However, despite the opposition from the Rise and Fall movement, the Sammā Arahaṃ tradition continued to flourish after the death of Luang Pho Sot under Wat Paknam’s two influential abbots, Somdet Phra Wannarat (Pun Puṇṇasiri), who later became Saṅgharāja Somdet Phra Ariyawongsakatayan, the 17th Supreme Patriarch of Bangkok, and Phra Ratchathewi (Chuang Varapuñño), who became Somdet Phra Ratchmangkhlachan. These two figures, along with monks and *mae chi*¹⁹⁷ direct pupils of Luang Pho Sot, played a major role in the continuation and spread of the Sammā Arahaṃ tradition as a whole, especially during the first few decades after Luang Pho Sot’s death.

¹⁹⁶ เองรักษาไว้ให้ได้ มีเงินเป็นหมื่นเป็นแสนก็หาซื้อไม่ได้.

¹⁹⁷ *Mae chis* are female renunciants who shave their heads, wear white and follow eight or ten precepts. They hold a position somewhere between the lay followers and the ordained monastics. For recent research regarding *mae chis*, see, for example, Lindberg Falk (2007), Collins and McDaniel (2010), Silaratano (2012) and Seeger (2010 and 2018).

Chapter Three

3. Sammā Arahaṃ tradition after Luang Pho Sot

3.1 Wat Paknam tradition

After the death of Luang Pho Sot in 1959, Somdet Wannarat (Pun Puṇṇasiri) of Wat Pho, who later became Saṅgharāja Ariyawongsakatayan, the 17th Supreme Patriarch of Bangkok, was appointed as temporary abbot of Wat Paknam from 1959 to 1966. As mentioned above, Saṅgharāja Pun, who wrote the first biography of Luang Pho Sot, had long been acquainted with Luang Pho Sot, having been ordained at the same temple, Wat Songphinong, Suphanburi, and resided at Wat Pho together with Luang Pho Sot prior to the latter's move to Wat Paknam. He held Luang Pho Sot in high regard and often visited Wat Paknam to pay respect to Luang Pho Sot's body¹⁹⁸ after he became the Supreme Patriarch. Saṅgharāja Pun became a member of the Thai Saṅgha Supreme Council (Mahatherasamakhom) and was appointed as Supreme Patriarch in 1972, a position that he held for almost two years. After Saṅgharāja Pun, Phra Ratchathewi (Chuang Varapuṇṇo), whose current monastic title is Somdet Ratchmangkhlachan, became the abbot of Wat Paknam. Somdet Chuang, a Pāli scholar who holds five honorary doctorates from universities in Thailand, Sri Lanka and India, was the assistant abbot and head of scriptural studies at Wat Paknam prior to his appointment as abbot. During his long tenure of almost

¹⁹⁸ Luang Pho Sot's body was not cremated, but was put into a coffin and placed inside a *vihāra* at Wat Paknam.

five decades, Somdet Chuang maintained and expanded the temple to its current size of 20 *rais* (eight acres), accommodating over 240 monks, 120 *mae chis*¹⁹⁹ and 50 novices (Wat Paknam 2015). He raised funds for a number of branch temples in Thailand and abroad. At the time of writing, Wat Paknam has five foreign branches: 1) Wat Mongkhon Thepmuni in Philadelphia, USA; 2) Wat Paknam, Chiba, Japan; 3) Wat Paknam, Tauranga, New Zealand; 4) Wat Paknam, Ohio, USA; and 5) Wat Paknam, Michigan, USA.

In Thailand, an important branch temple of Wat Paknam is Wat Chantharangsi in Angthong. The temple was built during the Ayutthaya period, and was renovated and patronized by the late Phra Thamrattanakon (Sa-ngat Aṅsumālī) (1938–2018), Luang Pho Sot's direct student and former assistant abbot of Wat Paknam. It is run by Phra Sa-gnat's student Phra Khru Bantthitanurak (Taem), who used to reside at Wat Paknam. The temple practises Sammā Arahaṃ meditation and receives funding from Wat Paknam. Other branches of Wat Paknam include Wat Mongkhon Thammakayaram in Chiang Rai, Wat Suan Lamyai in Lamphun, Wat Sombun Thammakayaram in Phichit and Wat Pa Charoen Thammakai in Roi-et. All of these temples practise Sammā Arahaṃ meditation and receive funding from Wat Paknam (Wat Paknam 2015). Wat Pa Charoen Thammakai's current abbot, Phra Bhavanāmaṅgala (Wiwat Katavaḍḍhano) and his father, whom he calls Luang Pho Sai, are immediate students of Luang Pho Sot and Phra Ratchaphromathen (Wira Gaṇuttamo), the late deputy abbot of Wat Paknam and Achan Sermchai's meditation teacher. Wat Paknam also established a number of *mae chi* centres, the most prominent one being the Suan Kaeo Meditation Centre in Ratchaburi established in 1997 by *mae chi*

¹⁹⁹ Female renunciants.

Wanchai Chukon (1933–), a direct pupil of Luang Pho Sot. *Mae chi* Wanchai started practising Sammā Arahaṃ meditation in 1952 at the age of 12, becoming a *mae chi* at Wat Paknam in 1958 at the age of 18, one year before Luang Pho Sot died. Today, she is among one of the few living direct pupils of Luang Pho Sot and resides both at Wat Paknam and the Suan Kaeo Meditation Centre. In the next chapter, I shall incorporate my interview with her as part of the debates and discussions among the different lineages of the tradition regarding Sammā Arahaṃ meditation (Wanchai 2016).

Saṅgharāja Pun and Somdet Chuang, along with monks and *mae chis* who were direct pupils of Luang Pho Sot, played a major role in the continuation and spread of Wat Paknam’s lineage, and Sammā Arahaṃ tradition as a whole, especially during the first few decades after Luang Pho Sot’s death and prior to the establishment of the Dhammakaya Temple and Wat Luang Pho Sot Thammakayaram. Their leadership and positions within the *saṅgha* hierarchy ensured that Sammā Arahaṃ meditation continued to be practised and taught at Wat Paknam and its associated temples and centres despite a number of criticisms from Pāli scholars and other meditation traditions.

Shortly before his death, Luang Pho Sot handed the teaching of Sammā Arahaṃ meditation to many of his leading students, both monks and laypeople. I would like to focus on two prominent figures responsible for transmitting Sammā Arahaṃ meditation from Wat Paknam to Wat Luang Pho Sot Thammakayaram and Dhammakaya Temple, namely Phra Ratchaphromathen (Wira Gaṇuttamo), who taught Phra Thep Yan Mongkhon (Achan Sermchai Jayamaṅgalo), the abbot of Wat Luang Pho Sot Thammakayaram, and *mae chi*

Thongsuk Samdaengpan, who taught *mae chi* Chan Khon Nokyung, who later founded the Dhammakaya Temple. It is not possible to account for the spread of Sammā Arahaṃ tradition to these temples without mentioning these two figures.

One of the most senior and prominent female teachers at Wat Paknam was *mae chi* Thongsuk Samdaengpan.²⁰⁰ Born in Bangkok in 1900, she married a surgeon who worked at Chulalongkorn Hospital and had two children with him. She met Luang Pho Sot in 1930, started practising Sammā Arahaṃ meditation under his guidance and attained *dhammakāya* at the age of 35. She became a *mae chi* at Wat Paknam at the age of 40 and remained a *mae chi* until her death in 1963 at the age of 63. *Mae chi* Thongsuk was entrusted by Luang Pho Sot with teaching meditation to *mae chis* at Wat Paknam and was sent, together with her pupil *mae chi* Thian Thirasawat, to teach Sammā Arahaṃ meditation outside Bangkok at various temples and centres in Chonburi, Nakhon Pathom, Chachoengsao, Ratchaburi, Singburi, Nakhon Sawan, Phitsanulok and Chiang Mai, recruiting thousands of practitioners. Two students of *mae chi* Thongsuk became prominent teachers of the Sammā Arahaṃ tradition: 1) *mae chi* Chan Khon Nokyung²⁰¹ (1909–2000), or as the Dhammakaya Temple affectionately calls her ‘Khun Yai’ (Grandmother), who together with her students founded Dhammakaya Temple; and 2) Karun Bunmanut²⁰² (1935–2018), a lay male meditation teacher based in Chanthaburi. *Mae chi* Chan was one of the leading students of *mae chi* Thongsuk and Luang Pho Sot. She was born in Nakhon Pathom into a farmer’s family. In 1935, at the age of 23, she travelled to Bangkok to work as a servant of Liab

²⁰⁰ Biographical information taken from Singhon (2008: 9–67).

²⁰¹ Biographical information taken from Dhammakaya Temple (2013).

²⁰² Biographical information taken from Sueksa Karun Foundation (2013).

Sikanchananan, a rich benefactor of Wat Paknam. She met *mae chi* Thongsuk through Liab and became her meditation pupil. Having made sufficient progress, she went on to study with Luang Pho Sot and became a *mae chi* at Wat Paknam in 1938. Another leading student of *mae chi* Thongsuk was a lay schoolteacher, Karun Bunmanut, who studied with *mae chi* Thongsuk from 1956 until the latter's death and then afterwards with *mae chi* Chan until 1966. Karun, together with *mae chi* Thian Thirasawat, Chaiboon Suthipol (who became Phra Dhammajayo) and Phadej Pongsawat (who became Phra Dattajīvo), helped *mae chi* Chan set up the Dhamma Prasit Group, a meditation practitioners' group, at Wat Paknam. Some members of this group later went on to become leading figures of the Dhammakaya Temple. Karun was working in the civil service as a teacher at Wat Bowonniwet School when *mae chi* Thongsuk died, and remained a pupil of *mae chi* Chan until 1966 when he was transferred to Ang Thong. There, he met *mae chi* Thanom Asawai, another senior pupil of Luang Pho Sot, who, after Luang Pho Sot's death, set up a meditation centre in Ang Thong and became her pupil for eight years. He moved back to his hometown, Chanthaburi, in 1982 to work as an assistant provincial education officer, where he taught meditation and wrote six books on the teachings of Luang Pho Sot and Sammā Arahāṃ meditation.

Another prominent meditation teacher at Wat Paknam was Phra Ratchaphromathen (Wira Gaṇuttamo), formerly known as Phra Phawana Koson Thera, the late deputy abbot and head of meditation (1919–2014).²⁰³ Half-Thai and half-Japanese, Phra Ratchaphromathen (Achan Wira Gaṇuttamo) was born in 1919 with the Thai name of Wira Uttaranathi and the Japanese name of Kunio Kawakita. He studied Japanese at the Japanese Society of

²⁰³ Biographical information taken from: Singhon (2008: 214–217).

Thailand and completed one year studying law at Thammasat University before the outbreak of World War II interrupted his education. After the war, he did not go back to studying, but helped his family conduct business with Japanese traders. He met Luang Pho Sot at the age of 34, towards the end of Luang Pho Sot's life, and became his meditation pupil in 1953. A year later, he was ordained at Wat Paknam with Luang Pho Sot as his preceptor. During Luang Pho Sot's lifetime, Achan Wira Gaṇuttamo acted as an assistant to Luang Pho Sot and Phra Phawana Koson Thera (Thira Dhammadharo) in teaching meditation to monks and laity at Wat Paknam. After Luang Pho Sot's death, Luang Pho Thira became the deputy abbot and head of scriptural studies and meditation.²⁰⁴ He died in 1968 and Achan Wira Gaṇuttamo succeeded him as the deputy abbot and head of meditation two years later. Wat Paknam's other deputy abbot, Phra Wisutthiwongsachan (Wichian Anomaguṇo), in charge of scriptural studies, is a Pāli scholar and member of the Thai Saṅgha Supreme Council (Mahatherasamakhom). Achan Wira Gaṇuttamo also took on the task of teaching meditation to foreigners at Wat Paknam and abroad. He went to teach meditation in the USA, the Netherlands, Germany, Sweden and Japan and was responsible for publishing Sammā Arahamaṃ meditation manuals in English, Japanese and Chinese. As he was the only monk able to speak Japanese fluently, he was given the task of teaching meditation to Japanese visitors. Achan Wira Gaṇuttamo taught and exchanged ideas with Sōtō-Zen Archbishop Takashina when he visited Thailand in 1954. He also taught a Nichiren monk who came for ordination at Wat Paknam in 1957 for six months

²⁰⁴ พระอาจารย์ใหญ่ฝ่ายคันถธุระและฝ่ายวิปัสสนาธุระ. The head teacher of 'fai khandhathura' and 'fai wipatsanathura'. This title means that the monk is recognized as both a Pāli and a meditation teacher and is responsible for overseeing scriptural studies (*ganthadhura*) and the practice of meditation (*vipassanādhura*).

and a Shingon monk who came for ordination in 1964 for five years. Achan Sermchai's works are influenced by Sammā Arahaṃ meditation, which he inherited mainly from Achan Wira Gaṇuttamo, who received the tradition from Luang Pho Sot. The interpretation of Buddhist doctrine and practice in Achan Sermchai's works is therefore rooted in Achan Wira Gaṇuttamo's understanding of Luang Pho Sot's teachings.

Luang Pho Sot also had Western students who became well-known meditation teachers. One of the first Westerners to be ordained as a Buddhist monk in Thailand was the English photographer and journalist William Purfurst (later known as Richard Randall) (1906–71), the author of the book *Life as a Siamese monk*, first published in 1990. Purfurst met Phra Thitavedo, a monk from Wat Paknam who travelled to England in 1953, and a year later went to Bangkok, took up residence at Wat Paknam and began studying Sammā Arahaṃ meditation under Luang Pho Sot. After his full recovery from pneumonia, which he believed was the result of the meditative power of *mae chis* at Wat Paknam, he became a monk in 1954 at Wat Paknam with Luang Pho Sot as his preceptor, and was given the monastic name of Kapilavaddho Bhikkhu (McKenzie 2007: 36–37). In 1956, Kapilavaddho returned to Britain to found the English Sangha Trust. He disrobed because of poor health, but was reordained at the Thai temple in Wimbledon, Wat Buddhapradīpa, before disrobing again because of poor health. Another important Western student of Luang Pho Sot is Phra Terence (Terry) Magness (1928–2012). Phra Terry was introduced to Sammā Arahaṃ meditation in 1958 and became a pupil of *mae chi* Kalyawadee, a student of Luang Pho Sot. He practised Sammā Arahaṃ meditation for 12 years before becoming a monk at Wat Doi Suthep, Chiang Mai, and was given the monastic name of

Phra Suratano Bhikkhu.²⁰⁵ Among Phra Terry's publications is the first English biography of Luang Pho Sot, *The life & teaching of the Venerable Chao Khun Monkol Thepmuni and the Dhammakāya*, first published in 1960.

3.2 Achan Sermchai and Wat Luang Pho Sot Thammakayaram

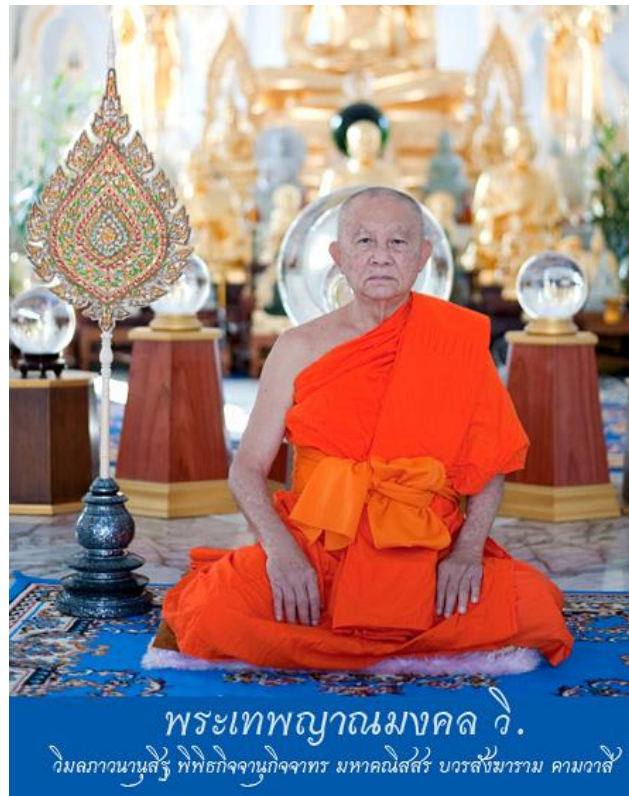


Figure 3.1: Photograph of Achan Sermchai (courtesy of Wat Luang Pho Sot Thammakayaram).

²⁰⁵ Biographical information taken from Triple Gem (2013).

This section aims to provide an account of Achan Sermchai's life and the history of Wat Luang Pho Sot Thammakayaram. Achan Wira Gaṇuttamo's biographies are useful because they provide an account of Achan Sermchai's introduction to Sammā Arahaṃ meditation and the establishment of the Dhammakaya Buddhist Meditation Project at Wat Saket in 1980 and the Dhammakaya Buddhist Meditation Foundation in Ratchaburi in 1981 by him and Achan Sermchai prior to Wat Luang Pho Sot Thammakayaram. This section also accounts for Achan Sermchai's reasons for his initial interest in meditation, his attraction to the Sammā Arahaṃ method and his decision to become a monk at the age of 57.

As will be argued below, Achan Sermchai's work provides a defence of the thought and practice of his tradition, which consists in demonstrating that it conforms to Theravāda canonical and commentarial tradition. This defence was not begun by Achan Sermchai but by Luang Pho Sot himself, who was continued by Achan Wira Gaṇuttamo, and later by Achan Sermchai, who not only provided further Pāli canonical statements but also statements demonstrating that his tradition conformed to the Pāli commentaries, subcommentaries and the views of other respected Thai monks. Achan Sermchai linked his teachers' and his own meditative experiences and the tradition he inherited to the experiences described in the Pāli canon and the commentaries. His work also attempts to redefine ideas found in his tradition in canonical terms and to provide doctrinal elaboration and systematization. This was in response to criticisms of the meditation tradition system as being heterodox.

The sources for this part are the biographies of Achan Sermchai, his teacher Achan Wira Gaṇuttamo's and the temple's histories in Thai.²⁰⁶ Parts of this summary is also taken from my five-hour interview with Achan Sermchai (2015). The interview focuses on his personal goals and objectives and adds more information to the biographical accounts.

Phra Thepyan Mongkhon (Sermchai Jayamaṅgalo), or, as he was known, Achan Sermchai (1929–2018), was born Sermchai Phonphatthanarit on 6 March 1929 in Nangrong district of Buriram province. His father, Thongdi, came from a family of provincial civil servants, and his mother, Bunnak, was of Chinese descent and came from a family of traders. His father owned farmlands and traded timber in the north-eastern part of Thailand. Sermchai was the fourth of six children.

As a child, Sermchai was dedicated to his studies. He received his primary and secondary education at local schools in Nangrong, but before he could begin his tertiary education, his father died. Sermchai had to earn a living in order to fund his bachelor's and master's degrees. He left Buriram and went to Bangkok alone to work at the Harbour Department and later at the Public Relations Department. He obtained his bachelor's degree in Commerce and Accounting and a master's degree in Public Administration from Thammasat University. During the 1950s and 1960s, Sermchai worked as assistant of the head of division and later as a research specialist in the Research Office of the United States

²⁰⁶ *Getting to know Wat Luang Pho Sot Thammakayaram, Damnoen Saduak district, Ratchaburi province* (Dhammakaya Buddhist Meditation Foundation 2010); *The history of Wat Luang Pho Sot Thammakayaram* (Dhammakaya Buddhist Meditation Foundation 2006); *Commemorating the auspicious year of Phra Phawana Kosonthera's 7th cycle of 84 years* (Sermchai 2003); and *Persons of original vijjā: Discover historical events of figures who lived during the time of Luang Pho Wat Paknam* (Singhon 2003).

Information Service (USIS), Bangkok, and was also a visiting lecturer on research and evaluation at various Thai universities, including Thammasat and Bangkok Universities. In 1949, he was sent by USIS to train at the Institute of Social Research, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, and received a certificate in public opinion survey research. Working for USIS, Sermchai and his colleagues had to analyse and inform the United States government on the social, political and economic affairs in the countries of Asia. The work-related stress led to his colleagues setting up a Dhamma group, which convened for 30 minutes during lunch breaks to discuss the Buddha's teachings and practise meditation. This group was what first led Sermchai to become interested in meditation.

Prior to his introduction to Sammā Araham meditation, he had studied a mindfulness of breathing method with a lay teacher at Wat Thatthong, Bangkok. Later, he studied the method of recollection of the Buddha at a meditation centre in Phetkasem Road, Bangkok. In this method, one concentrates on developing a mental image (*nimitta*) of a Buddha image, which is visualized as entering one's nostril and is then moved to one's chest via one's forehead (Witthaya 1999: 98). Interestingly, this is another meditation system containing the so-called *borān kammaṭṭhāna* characteristics of focusing on a *nimitta* of an image of the Buddha at various places in the body. Sermchai had visited Wat Paknam prior to his acquaintance with Phra Ratchaphromathen. He briefly studied Sammā Araham meditation with *mae chi* Thian Thirasawat, who was a pupil of *mae chi* Thongsuk Samdaengpan, and also briefly studied with *mae chi* Chan and Phra Dhammajayo with the Dhamma Prasit Group, but soon left due to a 'disagreement' (Sermchai 2015). His break with the Dhamma Prasit Group may be the reason why a number of scholars state that

Sermchai left the Dhammakaya Temple movement to found Wat Luang Pho Sot Thammakayaram (Bowers 1995: 66–67). Mackenzie (2007: 38) describes the movement of Wat Luang Pho Sot Thammakayaram as a reaction to the *mae chi* Chan movement's claim that it was 'the only group practising the authentic forms of *Dhammakāya* meditation' and its 'business-like approach to raising funds and recruiting new members'. He concludes that 'the inception of Wat Luang Phaw Sot Dhammakāyaram and the associated Dhammakāya Buddhist Meditation Foundation in 1991 was ostensibly the result of concern at Wat Phra Dhammakāya's excessively commercial approach to fund-raising and recruitment'. Newell states that Wat Luang Pho Sot 'was established following disagreements between some Wat Paknam followers and Wat Dhammakaya regarding the correct teaching of Dhammakāya meditation' (Newell 2008: 118). I think it is misleading to say that Achan Sermchai left the Dhammakaya Temple movement as I do not identify the Dhamma Prasit Group with Dhammakaya Temple because the group comprised many practitioners who were not associated with the temple: for example, two of the founding members of the group *mae chi* Thian Thirasawat and Karun Bunmanut left the Dhamma Prasit Group to set up their own meditation groups prior to the establishment of the Dhammakaya Temple. In the interview with him, Achan Sermchai asked me not to mention the specific details regarding his split with the Dhamma Prasit Group, but only to state that it was due to a 'disagreement' and a 'misunderstanding' regarding 'personal family matters' neither related to the meditation teachings nor the fund-raising and recruitment activities of the group. His criticisms of the Dhammakaya Temple in this context were made a number of years later.

As Sermchai continued to practise Sammā Arahaṃ meditation, he gained more and more faith in it and later, after making further progress, became wholly committed to practising and propagating it. In 1971, Achan Sermchai was introduced to Phra Ratchaphromathen (Achan Wira Gaṇuttamo). From then on, Achan Wira Gaṇuttamo became his main meditation teacher and mentor. A line of transmission has thus been established from Luang Pho Sot to Achan Sermchai via Achan Wira Gaṇuttamo. In the Dhammakaya Temple tradition, *mae chi* Chan, a pupil of *mae chi* Thongsuk and Luang Pho Sot, passed her knowledge on to Phra Dhammajayo and Phra Dattajīvo. However, it is important to point out that although he received most of his meditation training from Achan Wira Gaṇuttamo, Achan Sermchai also studied under *mae chi* Thian Thirasawat and *mae chi* Chan. Thus, the knowledge of the tradition was not passed from Luang Pho Sot to Achan Sermchai only via Achan Wira Gaṇuttamo, but via these two *mae chis* as well. It is quite common in a meditation tradition for a student to be taught by more than one teacher. Karun Bunmanut, as I mentioned earlier, studied with *mae chi* Thongsuk, *mae chi* Chan and *mae chi* Thanom Asawai. Most of the *mae chis* at Wat Paknam, like *mae chi* Chan, practised under a senior *mae chi* before moving on to study with Luang Pho Sot directly. Even though every lineage in a tradition proclaims the authenticity of the teachings of its founder, the network of teachers and students intermingling and exchanging ideas often creates a variation in the teaching, which originates from different emphases and personal interpretations of the teachers. This is one of the ways differing interpretations in the same tradition develop. This issue will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter regarding the debates and discussions among the different lineages of the Sammā Arahaṃ tradition.

As a lay meditation teacher, Achan Sermchai, with the help of Achan Wira Gaṇuttamo, founded three organizations. The first was the project called Dhamma Practice for the Public at Wat Paknam, Bangkok, in 1975, with Somdet Phra Ratchmangkhlachan (Somdet Chuang), the abbot of Wat Paknam, as the chairman. In 1980, he founded the Dhammakaya Buddhist Meditation Project at Wat Saket, Bangkok, with Somdet Phraphuthachan (Kiao Upaseṇa) as the chairman. And in 1981, he founded the Dhammakaya Buddhist Meditation Foundation in Damnoen Saduak district, Ratchaburi province. Achan Sermchai organized programmes and along with Achan Wira Gaṇuttamo taught meditation at Wat Paknam, Wat Saket and in Ratchaburi. It was this area in Ratchaburi that later became the location of Wat Luang Pho Sot Thammakayaram.

On 6 March 1986, Achan Sermchai resigned at the age of 57 from the United States Information Service to be ordained at Wat Paknam. Achan Sermchai had contemplated ordination for a long time and had informed his wife a decade earlier of his plan. His preceptor was Somdet Phra Phutthakhosachan (Fuen Jutindhara), the late abbot of Wat Samphraya. His ordination was assisted by two other senior monks, namely Somdet Kiao, the late abbot of Wat Saket, and Somdet Chuang, the abbot of Wat Paknam. Achan Sermchai resided at Wat Paknam for five years and at the same time continued to run and teach at the three organizations he had founded.

During the 1980s, the Dhammakaya Buddhist Meditation Foundation in Ratchaburi grew under the direction of Achan Sermchai and officially became a temple in 1991. The temple was given the name of Wat Luang Pho Sot Thammakayaram in commemoration of Luang

Pho Sot.²⁰⁷ Achan Sermchai became the abbot. The temple sources state that the objective of the temple is to ‘revitalize Buddhism with equal emphasis on meditation practice and scripture study’ (Phra Rajyanvisith 2007: 88). The temple’s Thai publication listed three more objectives: ‘1) to create Phra (Buddha) inside the minds of the public for their peace and happiness; 2) to create meditation teachers and educators in order to propagate Buddhism; and 3) to maintain Sammā Arahaṃ meditation as taught by the Venerable Phra Mongkhon Thepmuni (Sot Candasaro)’ (Wat Luang Pho Sot 2006: 2).²⁰⁸

In my interview with Achan Sermchai (2015), he stated that his life mission since he discovered Sammā Arahaṃ meditation has been to propagate Buddhism through Dhamma practice and education. He has encountered good and bad people in every religion, class, social status, political party, gender and nationality and desired to help all through Dhamma practice and education, improving the good ones and redeeming the bad ones. When Achan Sermchai first saw Achan Wira Gaṇuttamo, he immediately felt an overwhelming reverence, and after reading about Luang Pho Sot he also felt the same towards him. He said that Sammā Arahaṃ meditation and his prior training as a researcher have helped him to develop a deep understanding of the Buddha’s teachings.

Achan Sermchai’s reputation as a meditation master and scholar of Buddhism continued to grow. He began to speak about social, political and economic issues that affected society.

²⁰⁷ The name of the temple in the Roman alphabet is spelt as Wat Luang Phor Sodh Dhammakayaram. However, I shall use the spelling according to the guideline of the Royal Institute when referring to the temple.

²⁰⁸ ‘Phra’ here refers to the attainment of *dhammakāya*. The temple does not practise any other method apart from Sammā Arahaṃ meditation.

He commented on the corruption and instability of Thai politics, offering solutions according to what he saw as the principles of Buddhist governance. He appeared on television and radio offering advice on how to live an ethical life and how to solve problems according to the Noble Eightfold Path. His publications in Thai and English cover many topics, such as *kamma*, the 10 objects of meritorious action, Buddhist governance, ethics for household life, the value of gratitude, cosmology and sermons in praise of King Bhumibol. When significant tragedies occurred in Thailand, such as the 2004 tsunami and various political crises, Achan Sermchai's teaching offered condolences to the victims and encouraged national reconciliation. When new constitutions were being drafted in 2007 and 2015, Achan Sermchai spoke out for the designation of Buddhism as the state religion.²⁰⁹

Over the years, his monastic titles changed and his responsibilities increased. Achan Sermchai received the monastic titles of Phra Phawanawisutthikhun in 1998, Phra Ratyanwisit in 2004 and Phra Thepyan Mongkhon in 2012. He passed the highest level of Naktham (Dhamma studies) and the sixth-grade Pāli examination,²¹⁰ and held two honorary doctorate degrees, one in Buddhist Management from Mahachulalongkorn Buddhist University received in 2007 and the other in Buddhist Studies from Mahamakut

²⁰⁹ See Sermchai (2007). For several decades, Buddhist groups, monks and scholars have been making proposals to the Constitution Drafting Assembly to include Buddhism as Thailand's official state religion, the most recent attempts being in 2007 and 2015 during the coup-installed General Surayud Chulanont and General Prayut Chan-o-cha governments. The assembly rejected the proposals both times, citing possible outcomes of religious divisions and conflicts. For further discussions, see, for example, Dusit (2002), Payutto (2007), Dhammaghosācāriya (2007), Suthiwong (2010) and Aditthep (2016).

²¹⁰ In Thailand, the study of Buddhist teachings consists of three grades. Those who pass the examinations are called 'Naktham'. The study of Pāli consists of seven grades, starting with grade 3 and ending with grade 9. Those who pass the examinations are called 'Parian'.

Buddhist University received in 2009. In 2008, Achan Sermchai was appointed the chairman of the National Co-ordination Centre of Provincial Meditation Institutes of Thailand. Achan Sermchai's two publications on behalf of the centre, *The handbook for the study of the three trainings* and *The handbook of the five traditions of samatha vipassanā kammaṭṭhāna*, which provide his systematization and reinterpretation of Sammā Arahaṃ meditation, and an attempt to create harmony and prevent discord among the various meditation traditions in Thailand, respectively, will be examined in the next chapter.²¹¹

In my interview with Phra Mahā Chinphat Chinnālayo (1983–), a monk at Wat Luang Pho Sot Thammakayaram and Acham Sermchai's former secretary, he informs me that in 2018, the temple housed approximately 80 monks and 40 novices. 11 monks passed the highest ninth-grade Pāli examination. Five monks held master's degrees and two monks doctorate degrees in Buddhism from Mahachulalongkorn Buddhist University. During the three-month rain retreat, the number of monks can rise to 100 and novices to 50 thanks to temporary ordination. The temple receives about 20,000 visitors per year (Chinpat 2018). It organizes two meditation retreats for monks and laypeople annually. The retreats are conducted both in Thai and in English and are attended by approximately 400 monks and 2,400 laypeople per year. The retreats in English receive about 50 lay participants mainly from the USA, the Netherlands, Spain, Malaysia and Singapore (Chinpat 2018). Each summer, it organizes a two-week novice ordination programme. Wat Luang Pho Sot Thammakayaram also has a temple network. Of the pupils of Achan Sermchai who resided

²¹¹ คู่มือการศึกษาสัมมาปฏิบัติไตรสิกขา and คู่มือปฏิบัติสมณะวิปัสสนากัมมัฏฐาน ๕ สาย.

at Wat Luang Pho Sot Thammakayaram, 12 have become abbots of temples in various provinces in the central, north-eastern and southern regions, such as Angthong, Phetchaburi, Singburi, Nakhon Ratchasima, Nongkhai, Rayong and Buriram provinces (Chinpat 2018). Those temples are associated with Wat Luang Pho Sot Thammakayaram, and teach and practise Sammā Arahaṃ meditation.

3.3 Dhammakaya Temple

In 1968, *mae chi* Chan, Phra Dhammajayo and Phra Dattajīvo obtained a piece of land in the north of Bangkok and started developing the site into a temple. Dhammakaya Temple in Pathum Thani began as a meditation centre in 1970 and was registered as a temple in 1978. The Dhammaprasit Foundation changed its name to the Dhammakaya Foundation and became the supporting organization of the temple responsible for proselytization. Its activities include organizing meditation retreats, scriptural education, youth training, school orientations, social services and environmental conservation. Two of *mae chi* Chan's pupils, Phra Dhammajayo and Phra Dattajīvo, became the abbot and assistant abbot, respectively. The growth of the temple over the last four decades has been phenomenal. From a small meditation centre, the temple has expanded to cover an area of over 2,500 *rais* (990 acres), with over 1,400 monks and 400 novices, and receives more than 100,000 people from around the world on major Buddhist days. The *cetiya*, completed in 2000, is one of the biggest Buddhist monuments in the world and serves as a world pilgrimage site. Its vicinity is said to be able to hold one million people. The temple has more than 50 branches and centres in Thailand and more than 130 branches and centres

abroad, as well as its own satellite channel, the Dhammakaya Meditation Channel (DMC), which broadcasts meditation instructions, news, sermons and children's programmes 24/7 across the world.²¹²

The temple became an influential movement among university students and attracted supporters from Buddhist societies in many universities and colleges. It seeks support by organizing retreats for male and female students and temporary ordinations. It also receives financial support from influential businessmen, politicians and military officials. The most controversial supporters of the temple are the Shinawatra family. The telecommunications and property tycoons Thaksin and his sister Yingluck Shinawatra, who became prime ministers of Thailand (Thaksin 2001–6; Yingluck 2011–14), and who were both ousted by military coups on charges of corruption, are among the major contributors. These people were attracted to the temple's grandeur, cleanliness, size and international reputation. In 1999, the temple became the subject of public criticism by Buddhist intellectuals and the media. The two main charges were Buddhist commercialism in terms of its use of marketing techniques to attract donations, and 'heterodox' teachings of *nibbāna* as self and a place-like realm. In December that year, the abbot was charged with embezzling the temple's assets. In 2006, the charges were dropped by the General Prosecutor on the grounds that the abbot had returned all the assets and agreed to teach according to Theravāda Buddhist doctrines as instructed by the Thai Saṅgha Supreme Council (Mahatherasamakhom). Many critics of the temple believe that this dismissal was due to

²¹² Information taken from Dhammakaya Temple (2019). For further discussions regarding Dhammakaya Temple, see Bowers (1996), Mackenzie (2007) and Scott (2009).

the political influence of Thaksin Shinawatra. The temple made the headlines again when, in 2015, its abbot and other monks at the temple were investigated for receiving more than 900 million baht in donations from the former chairman of Klongchan Credit Union Cooperative, who is under investigation by the Department of Special Investigation for fraud and embezzlement. As a result, in 2017, the temple was raided by thousands of police and special investigation officers, but they failed to capture Phra Dhammajayo, who is wanted on charges of money laundering and embezzlement.

Scott (2009: 49–52) sees striking similarities between Dhammakaya Temple and two other Buddhist movements, namely Soka Gakkai in Japan and Foguang Shan in Taiwan. According to her, the three movements have grown exponentially in the postmodern period thanks to their positive orientation towards modernity, including the use of modern technology and marketing techniques. They have sought to make Buddhism relevant to the contemporary world, while emphasizing the continuity of their doctrine and practice with the traditions of Buddhism from which they emerged (Scott 2009: 49–50). In the case of Dhammakaya Temple, the emphasis lies in its association with the founder of the Sammā Arahaṃ tradition, Luang Pho Sot, and his ‘star’ student, *mae chi* Chan, and the wider Theravāda tradition, to which it belongs. However, these three movements’ proselytizations have also attracted criticisms concerning their teachings, methods of instruction, impressive size and material wealth (Scott 2009: 50). Mackenzie (2007: 67–74) also observes similarities between Dhammakaya Temple and Soka Gakkai in the six following areas: 1) their easily understood teachings; 2) a focus on this-worldly benefits;

3) high standards of publicity; 4) goals of global expansion; 5) providing a sense of belonging to their members; and 6) emphases on recruitment and fund-raising.

The relationship between Dhammakaya Temple and Wat Luang Pho Sot Thammakayaram has always been one of silent disapproval and disagreements. As mentioned above, Achan Sermchai left the Dhammaprasit Group at Wat Paknam shortly after joining it because of a disagreement and a misunderstanding regarding personal family matters. Achan Sermchai continued to dissociate himself from Dhammakaya Temple and all the members of that group for the rest of his life. According to Dhammakaya Temple followers, Achan Sermchai did not progress as much as Phra Dhammajayo because his meditation teacher did not have as many *pāramī* (perfections) as *mae chi* Chan (Mackenzie 2007: 58). Achan Sermchai, who was often critical of Dhammakaya Temple's fund-raising and recruiting techniques, claimed that although *mae chi* Chan was an 'advanced practitioner' who was able to achieve the 'highest level of *dhammakāya*', being illiterate, she did not grasp the *pariyatti* (scriptural) side of Luang Pho Sot's teachings and was not able to connect *Sammā Arahaṃ* meditation with the Pāli textual authority, as his teacher Achan Wira Gaṇuttamo was able to (Bowers 1996: 68–69; Sermchai 2015).

Perhaps because of prior controversies, in 2004, the temple established the Dhammachai International Research Institute (DIRI) with the objective of conducting research into the early Buddhist teachings from different Buddhist traditions around the world.²¹³ It has three centres: Berrilee, Australia; Dunedin, New Zealand; and Dhammakaya Temple, Pathum

²¹³ Information taken from the Dhammachai International Research Institute (2015).

Thani, Thailand. The institute has organized international seminars and conferences regarding early Buddhism, Buddhist history, archaeology and traditional meditation. Its academic journal, the *Dhammachai International Research Institute Journal*, published two volumes in 2012 and 2013 containing articles by DIRI members and some non-members. The institute's 2014 publication, *Evidence of dhammakāya in ancient Buddhist texts: Volume 1*,²¹⁴ will be discussed in Chapter 4.7 regarding apologetic works by other Sammā Arahaṃ lineages.

In my e-mail correspondence with Chanida Jantrasrisalai, I asked her whether the temple teaches the 18-body and higher levels of Sammā Arahaṃ meditation to the general public because, from browsing through the temple's website and publications, the basic level seems to be much more accessible than the higher levels. This is also observed by Bowers (1996: 73–76), Mackenzie (2007: 231) and Newell (2008: 233), who conclude that at Wat Luang Pho Sot, higher levels of meditation are encouraged by the abbot than at Dhammakaya Temple, which focuses mainly on the basic technique for the masses. She informed me that for the higher levels, Phra Dhammajayo selects those who are capable and teaches them privately (Chanida Jantrasrisalai, 21 October 2015, e-mail message to the author). The temple does not like to disclose higher levels of Sammā Arahaṃ meditation to the public as this may lead to 'misunderstanding' and 'incorrect practice'. There are over 100 practitioners, mostly monks, who have progressed beyond the basic level. She also informs me that the temple teaches simplified versions of Sammā Arahaṃ meditation to children and foreigners, adapting them according to their age, cultures and religious

²¹⁴ หลักฐานธรรมกายในคัมภีร์พุทธโบราณ๑.

backgrounds: for example, instead of crystal spheres, children are told to visualize the sun, the moon or an orange; people from the Solomon Islands are taught to visualize a coconut as it is the most familiar object in their culture; and Muslims are taught to visualize their religious symbols, for example the crescent moon or a star, in order to create mental calmness (Chanida Jantrasrisalai, 21 October 2015, e-mail message to the author).

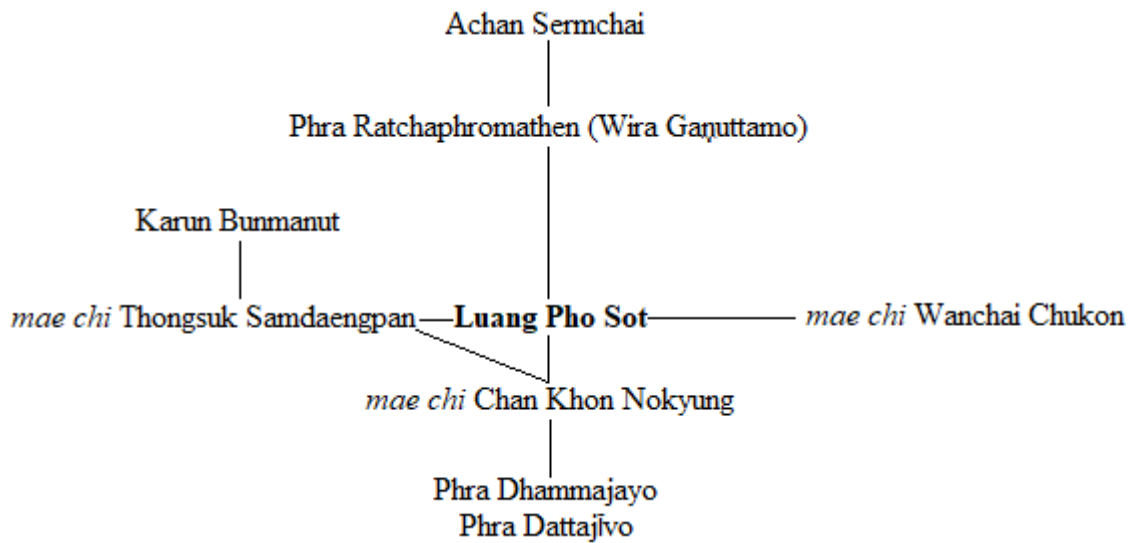


Figure 3.2: Teachers of the main lineages of Sammā Arahaṃ tradition.

The above chart shows the main teachers of the three main lineages of the Sammā Arahaṃ tradition: Wat Paknam (Phra Ratchaphromathen and *mae chi* Thongsuk), Wat Luang Pho Sot (Achan Sermchai) and Dhammakaya Temple (*mae chi* Chan, Phra Dhammajayo and Phra Dattajīvo). The teachers directly connected to Luang Pho Sot are his direct pupils. The distances of their names from Luang Pho Sot indicate the number of years they were acquainted with Luang Pho Sot. The closest to Luang Pho Sot's name, i.e. *mae chi* Thongsuk, has known Luang Pho Sot the longest. The second longest is *mae chi* Chan, followed by *mae chi* Wanchai and lastly Phra Ratchaphronmathen. I have not added *mae*

chi Thian Thirasawat as one of Achan Sermchai's teachers as Phra Ratchaphromathen was his main teacher.

Mae chi Chan was taught by Luang Pho Sot and *mae chi* Thongsuk, who are both considered her main teachers. *Mae chi* Thongsuk was also the teacher of Karun Bunmanut, a lay meditation teacher whose pupil's article I shall discuss in the next chapter regarding debates and discussions among the different lineages of the Sammā Arahaṃ tradition. I have added *mae chi* Wanchai to this chart as Suan Kaeo is an important *mae chi* centre and also because I shall incorporate my interview with her in the next chapter.

3.4 Wat Mongkhonthep and Phra Khru Phawana Sitthikhun (Bancha Sirivijjaya)

Another temple in the Sammā Arahaṃ tradition worth mentioning is in Wat Mongkhonthep Chachoengsao province. This temple was founded by Phra Khru Phawana Sitthikhun (Bancha Sirivijjaya) (1946–). It was established as a meditation centre in 1994 and later became a temple in 1999. Achan Bancha, the abbot of Wat Mongkhonthep, is a unique figure in the Sammā Arahaṃ community as he claims not to belong to any lineage in the tradition. All meditation teachers mentioned above are either direct pupils of Luang Pho Sot or belong to a lineage that can be traced back to Luang Pho Sot. Others who were previously taught by Luang Pho Sot have gone on to establish their own systems or opted to practise other methods in conjunction with Sammā Arahaṃ meditation. However, Achan Bancha is the only figure recognized by Wat Paknam whose training in Sammā Arahaṃ meditation has been completely self-taught. In my interview with him at Wat

Mongkhonthep, Achan Bancha (2017) does not acknowledge any meditation teacher at Wat Paknam or any other temple in the Sammā Arahaṃ tradition as his direct teacher.²¹⁵ His practice of Sammā Arahaṃ meditation was from reading and listening to Luang Pho Sot's teachings in books and recorded sermons. He started practising meditation after he became a monk in 1986. Prior to practising Sammā Arahaṃ, he had tried every other meditation method available to him, for example Buddhho, Rise and Fall, *ānāpānasati*, Nāma-Rūpa, etc. but found the Sammā Arahaṃ meditation system the most effective. As a result of not having a teacher, Wat Mongkhonthep is an independent temple not affiliated with, or a branch of, Wat Paknam or any other temple in this tradition. However, the temple practises and teaches Sammā Arahaṃ meditation and acknowledges Luang Pho Sot as the tradition's founder. It offers meditation classes every Sunday and important Buddhist days and organizes one- to three-day meditation retreats for students, government organizations and the general public. There are currently seven monks at the temple. The monks there focus more on meditation practice than scriptural learning. The abbot and some of the monks have passed the highest Naktham Ek (Dhamma Studies grade), but the abbot does not encourage the monks to take Pāli *parian* examinations (Bancha 2017).

Despite not having any teacher or belonging to any lineage, Achan Bancha and Wat Mongkhonthep are recognized by Wat Paknam as a temple within the tradition. Somdet Chuang, the abbot of Wat Paknam, visited the temple several times in 2007, 2008 and 2014 to preside over the casting of Buddha images and images of Luang Pho Sot, and to lay the boundary stones of the ordination hall. Somdet Phra Phuthachan (Kiao Upaseṇo), the late

²¹⁵ On 23 July 2017.

abbot of Wat Saket, Bangkok, and one of the main patrons of Wat Luang Pho Sot Thammakayaram, also visited the temple several times and was the one who named the temple Mongkhonthep after Luang Pho Sot's monastic title. As I mentioned above, the fact that Achan Bancha and Wat Mongkhonthep are recognized by Wat Paknam as a teacher and a temple within the tradition shows that Sammā Arahaṃ meditation is essentially a non-esoteric system in the sense that to be accepted into the tradition requires neither an initiation nor having a direct teacher within the tradition.

3.5 The influence of Luang Pho Sot outside the Sammā Arahaṃ tradition

A meditation master's influence is not usually confined to his own tradition alone. In the previous chapter, I have demonstrated this with regard to Luang Pho Niam's, Luang Pho Nong's and Saṅgharāja Suk Kai Thuean's meditation systems and shown how Luang Pho Sot took and adapted aspects of their practices and incorporated them into Sammā Arahaṃ meditation.

In this section, I consider two meditation masters whose teachings and practices were influenced by Luang Pho Sot and Sammā Arahaṃ meditation, namely, 1) Phra Ratchaphromyan (Wira Thāvaro) or, as he is popularly known, Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam (Black Monkey Sage); and 2) *Bhikṣuṇī* Voramai Kabilsingh, the first Thai woman to receive ordination from both the male and the female *saṅgha*. I also discuss one meditation master belonging to Achan Man's forest tradition, namely, Phra Ariyakhunathan (Pusso

Seng), whose teachings and practices may have been influenced by Luang Pho Sot and Sammā Arahaṃ meditation.

The spread and popularization of the Sammā Arahaṃ tradition owed a lot to the reputation of its founder. The status of Luang Pho Sot as a nationally revered figure, praised not only by practitioners of his own tradition, but also by other venerated teachers who incorporated his teachings into their practices, has helped boost the reputation and popularity of Sammā Arahaṃ meditation in Thailand over the last 50 years. These popular teachers not only held Luang Pho Sot in high regard but, in the cases of Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam and Achan Voramai Kabilsingh, also recommended their students to study Luang Pho Sot's teachings and practise Sammā Arahaṃ meditation.

3.5.1 Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam and the Manomayiddhi meditation tradition

Phra Ratchaphromyan, or Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam, is the late abbot of Wat Tha Sung, Uthai Thani province.²¹⁶ A highly revered figure in Thailand, he is known for founding the

²¹⁶ Biographical accounts, meditation practice and thought are taken from the following books by Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam (Wira Thāvaro): 1) ประวัติวัดท่าซุงและหลวงพ่อพระราชพรหมญาณ *The history of Wat Tha Sung and biography of Luang Pho Phra Ratchaphromyan*, published in Bangkok in 2008 by Yellow Kanphim. This book is 66 pages long. It consists of a history of Wat Tha Sung and a biography of Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam. The introduction states that this book is a compilation of different accounts given by Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam himself and his immediate students. It serves as a guide to the temple for visitors and new students; 2) การฝึกมนมยิดดี *The training of Manomayiddhi*, published in Bangkok in 1984 by Yellow Kanphim. This book is 176 pages long and is taken from recordings of Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam and his pupils teaching *Manomayiddhi* in 1978. The book begins with Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam's advice on how to practise *Manomayiddhi*, followed by dialogues between Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam and his pupils teaching meditation; 3) มโนมยิดดีและประวัติของฉัน *Manomayiddhi and my biography*, published in 2011. The publisher and place of publication are not stated. This popular book is the 20th edition of the original published in 1984. It is 200 pages long and records Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam's accounts of his discovery and training in *Manomayiddhi* meditation by Achan Suk and other accounts of his life, including his meeting with King Rama IX and his prophecies about the future of Thailand; 4. คู่มือ

Manomayiddhi meditation tradition and for making several prophesies about the future of Thailand. Although his meditation tradition does not belong to the Sammā Arahaṃ tradition, he adopted aspects of its thought and practice to his tradition.

Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam was born in 1916 in Suphanburi province, the son of a well-to-do farmer. At the age of 20, he was ordained at Wat Bang Khonom, Ayutthaya province. His act-announcing teacher (*kammavācācāriya*) at Wat Bang Khonom was Luang Pho Pan Sonando, who became his mentor and main meditation teacher. Between 1936 and 1939 he sought meditation guidance from well-known masters; among them was Luang Pho Niam, Wat Noi, who taught Luang Pho Pan and Luang Pho Sot. As I mentioned above, Luang Pho Sot, Luang Pho Pan and Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam were among a network of adept meditation students of Luang Pho Niam whose understanding of *nibbāna* and inner bodies was influenced by him. According to Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam, Luang Pho Sot was particularly close to his teacher, Luang Pho Pan, as they both had to examine each other's meditation progress while studying with Luang Pho Niam. Later, Luang Pho Pan recommended that Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam should visit Wat Paknam for one month to study Sammā Arahaṃ meditation with Luang Pho Sot (Sangsuwan 1989: part 7).²¹⁷ Sammā

ปฏิบัติพระกัมมัฏฐาน *Handbook for practising kammaṭṭhāna*. This book is 188 pages long. Its year and place of publication and publisher are omitted. It consists of Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam's teaching of calm and insight meditation covering all of the 40 meditation objects and the nine insight knowledges in Buddhaghosa's Path of Purification and includes a short description of Manomayiddhi, his understanding of inner bodies and visionary experiences.

²¹⁷ This episode is described in the book titled หนังสืออ่านเล่น เล่มที่ ๖ *Pastime reading vol. 6* written by Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam under his pen name So Sangsuwan. The book is divided into ten parts. It is a compilation of talks on various topics regarding interesting episodes in Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam's biography, his travels and visions in meditation. The seventh part, titled พระอรหันต์มาโปรด or 'an *arahant* preached to me', details his visit to Wat Paknam and the teachings he received from Luang Pho Sot. The book is out of print, but its Internet version can be downloaded from Wat Tha Sung's website: <http://www.watthasung.com/wat/viewthread.php?tid=1248>

Araham meditation became one of many methods he incorporated into his teachings and practice. At the age of 53, he became the abbot of Wat Tha Sung. He carried out extensive renovation and additions to the temple, which expanded to become an important meditation temple in the region. He taught various meditation methods but was most famous for the Manomayiddhi method, which became very popular and attracted students from all over the country. He died of septicaemia in 1992, at the age of 76.

I shall briefly summarize the Manomayiddhi method and then provide an analysis of it and compare it with Luang Pho Sot's Sammā Araham meditation in order to show the possible influences and adaptations.

Manomayiddhi is described by Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam (Wira Ṭhāvaro 2011: 1) as the 'power of the mind', but in the Pāli canon it refers to the attainment of a mind-made body, which is one of the eight supernatural knowledges and powers (*vijjās*) found in the standard formula: for example, in the Sāmaññaphala Sutta, the second discourse of the Dīgha Nikāya (D I 76–84). In this discourse, the Buddha lists mind-made bodies along with seven other abilities, namely insight knowledge (*vipassanāñāṇa*), higher powers (*iddhividhā*) such as walking on water and through walls, divine ear or clairaudience (*dibbasota*), mind reading (*cetopariyañāṇa*), recollection of past lives (*pubbenivāsānussati*), divine eye or clairvoyance (*dibbacakkhu*) and knowledge of destruction of influxes or cankers that keep one bound to the world (*āsavakkhayañāṇa*), as being among the benefits of a contemplative life. The first seven powers are acquired through meditative concentration whereas the eighth is obtained through insight. The last three are also grouped together as *tevijjā* and

are found in a number of discourses, for example the Mahāsaccaka Sutta (M I 237). In this group, the divine eye is sometimes replaced by, or used synonymously with, the term *cutūpapātañāṇa* or knowledge of the death and rebirth of beings. The reason why Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam terms Manomayiddhi as the ‘power of the mind’, and not the mind-made body, is because the mind-made body is only one among many attainments that are developed in this meditation method. Although at the beginning, the practitioner aims to attain a luminescent body that can travel to various realms of the cosmos, the higher stages of Manomayiddhi meditation consist in developing all eight supernatural knowledges and powers, which culminates in the destruction of cankers and the attainment of *nibbāna*.

Like other traditional meditation methods mentioned above, visionary experience, both as mental images (*nimittas*) and real visions associated with the attainment of the divine eye, is vital for progressing in this meditation method. This can be seen as a continuity and persistence of the traditional style of meditation as visionary experience is a very important component in King Taksin’s meditation manual, in all meditation texts prior to the nineteenth century in the Chai Yasothornrat anthology and in Sammā Arahaṇ meditation. Moreover, this method seems to require a great deal of faith in the Buddhist cosmology, *kamma* and rebirth. The aim of this method is to achieve the divine eye and mind-made body or what this tradition calls ‘*ādissamāna kāya*’, which is explained as the body that cannot be seen with the human eye, but must be ‘seen’ with the mind or *ñāṇa* of the meditator. Once these two attainments are achieved, the meditator is able to travel and see the various realms of the Buddhist cosmology. The objective in seeing the three realms is to understand the nature of *kamma*, rebirths and the impermanence, suffering and not-self

of *samsāra* in order to aspire to *nibbāna* in the present life. The meditator who achieves mental purity that is free from all hindrances and the grasping of the five aggregates, even temporarily, is able to visit *nibbāna*, and see and communicate with the Buddhas and *arahants* in *nibbāna*, an aspect that is derived from Luang Pho Niam's teachings.

Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam explains that he obtained Manomayiddhi meditation from two teachers, namely Achan Sing Muenbunton, Pai district, Maehongson province, and Achan Suk Ban Phaeo, Damnoen Saduak district, Ratchaburi province. It is unknown who first taught this, but it has supposedly been passed down via many teachers. In the *Handbook for practising kammaṭṭhāna*, Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam (Wira Ṭhāvaro n.d.: 10–12) tells us that the more widely practised Manomayiddhi method is based on Buddhaghosa's Path of Purification, which requires the practitioner to master one type of *kaṣiṇa* meditation, reach the fourth *jhāna*, etc. as a prerequisite for attaining a mind-made body. However, after witnessing Achan Suk, who was a layman, teaching another layman to attain *ādissamāna kāya* to visit Yama, the god of death, in hell, Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam realized that Achan Suk's method provides a short cut to achieving this. With the aid of rituals and mantras, the practitioner can achieve visionary experience after reaching only the level of pre-*jhānic* access concentration (*upacāra samadhi*). Instead of taking years, many students were successful even in their first sessions, while the slower ones took about two days to achieve success. In the end, Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam opted to teach Achan Suk's method as he found it most suitable for laypeople. The following is a summary of the basic method outlined in the *Handbook for practising kammaṭṭhāna* (Wira Ṭhāvaro n.d.: 12).

Before a meditation session, the pupil must pay respect to the teacher with three flowers, one candle, three incense sticks and one coin worth 25 *satangs* (a quarter of a baht). The teacher will spray the pupil with sacred water blessed by chanting the *iti pi so* formula before and after each meditation session in order to prevent agitation of the mind. This Pāli formula, as mentioned above, is found throughout the Pāli canon and describes the qualities of the Buddha. A sacred mace is also used by the teacher to bless the pupil in order for the pupil's mind to be bright and alert. The words '*na ma ba dha*' are written on a rectangular piece of paper in Khom script and placed over the face of the pupil. Three incense sticks are lit and inserted into the paper. This is done at the same time as the pupil recites '*na ma*' when breathing in and '*ba dha*' while breathing out until the pupil's body begins to shake. The teacher then lifts the papers from the pupil's face and asks the pupil whether he or she sees any brightness. If not, the teacher sets the paper on fire and swings it around the pupil's face and says '*namo buddhāya*, may brightness appear to this pupil' until the pupil sees brightness. The teacher then asks the pupil whether they want to visit heaven or hell, the pupil chooses and the teacher gives the pupil permission to visit whichever place they prefer. The pupil is guided by the teacher around these realms and tells the teacher what they see and whom they meet; the teacher then confirms or rejects the pupil's experiences. For more experienced practitioners, the placing of the paper on the face can be omitted.

Some aspects of this meditation method are similar to Sammā Arahaṃ meditation, namely the visualizing and seeing of inner bodies, including *dhammakāya*, like a crystal Buddha image, seeing the mind as a sphere within the body, seeing the colours of the mind changing

according to its nature, and seeing *nibbāna* as a place where the Buddha and *arahants* reside. Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam acknowledges various teachers as the source of these understandings. His perspective on *nibbāna* is derived from many teachers, including Luang Pho Niam, Luang Pho Pan and Luang Pho Sot; the attainment of inner bodies is derived from many teachers, also including Luang Pho Niam (Phra Ratchaphromyan 1990: part 1).²¹⁸ His understanding of *dhammakāya* as the supra-mundane body of the *arahants* and appearing like crystal is derived from Luang Pho Sot (Wira Ṭhāvaro 2011: 28–9). As regards the visualization and seeing of multicoloured spheres, although not stated, these could have been obtained from many teachers, including Luang Pho Sot as well, as they are not exclusive to *Sammā Arahaṃ* meditation but are characteristics of *borān kammaṭṭhāna* tradition, and are found in other pre-modern meditation methods in Thailand: for example, the visualization of a sphere is found in King Taksin’s manual and in Saṅgharāja Suk Kai Thuean’s text, and seeing the mind as a sphere of different colours is found in Achan Man’s teaching.

With regard to other aspects of *Sammā Arahaṃ* meditation, the *Manomayiddhi* method does not utilize the bodily bases. The sphere is not visualized but is experienced visually in meditation as one’s own mind and the minds of others. It does not use the *sammā arahaṃ* mantra but uses mantras, ‘*na ma ba dha*’ and ‘*namo buddhāya*’. ‘*Na ma ba dha*’, according to Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam, means ‘respect to the Buddha’ and also represents the four

²¹⁸ This is recorded in volume 17 of หนังสืออ่านเล่น (*Pastime reading*) written by Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam under his monastic title Phra Ratchaphromyan. The book is divided into eight parts and describes Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam’s meditation training with Luang Pho Niam and his travels with Luang Pho Pan. Its Internet version can be downloaded from Wat Tha Sung’s website: <http://www.watthasung.com/wat/viewthread.php?tid=1598>

elements (earth, water, wind and fire). It is recited in order for the meditator to achieve mental clarity and power. *Namo buddhāya*, which in Pāli means ‘praise the Buddha’, is explained as referring to the five Buddhas of this aeon and is used by teachers to aid pupils’ vision and clarity, and to protect them while they are developing *ādissamāna kāya*. This association between sacred syllables and the five Buddhas is a characteristic of the so-called *borān kammaṭṭhāna* tradition and is also found in Saṅgharāja Suk Kai Thuean’s text. The teacher recites this while transferring power from the sacred mace and while lighting the paper or shining a torch at the pupil’s face. The *iti pi so* formula is also used to bless the students with sacral water. ‘*Na ma ba dha*’, written on a piece of paper in Khom script, is a form of *yantra* and also serves as protection and an aid to clarity. These aspects can also be seen as continuity and persistence of traditional meditation practices.

In the *Handbook for practising kammaṭṭhāna* (Wira Ṭhāvaro n.d.: 15–16), Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam interprets the statement ‘body in body’ in the Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta similarly to Luang Pho Sot. He explains that the first step of being mindful of the body is to examine the organs within the body, but for those who have attained *cutūpapātañāṇa* or knowledge of the deaths and rebirths of beings, they will be able to examine not just the organs within the body but also the inner bodies, i.e. *ādissamāna kāya*, which can only be seen with *ñāṇa*, i.e. a divine eye. The inner bodies, as in Sammā Arahaṃ meditation, correspond to the levels of existence in Buddhist cosmology into which one might be reborn as a result of past actions. Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam explains further that normally we all see our inner body when we visit different places in our dreams, but those who have

mastered *cutūpapātāñña* will see five kinds of inner body within themselves and others.

The following is a direct translation regarding inner bodies.

1. *Kai Abaiyaphum* [*apāyabhūmi kāya* or deprivation state body] has the form and characteristics of a beggar, appearing as dull, saddened, wearied, gaunt and not radiant. They [those with a deprivation state body prior to death] will be reborn in the suffering realm [*apāyabhūmi*].²¹⁹

2. *Kai Manut* [human body] has a form and characteristics that are quite radiant, fully human. They differ in shapes, skin colours, complexions and beauty but all with the clear characteristics of human beings. They will be reborn again as human beings.²²⁰

3. *Kai Thip* [*deva* body] is the body of a *deva* in the sensual realm with a radiant and refined form. For tree-dwelling and heavenly *devas* or above, one will also see their crowns and very beautiful ornaments. They will be reborn as *devas* of the sensual realms.²²¹

²¹⁹ ภายอบายภูมิ มีรูปร่างลักษณะ คล้ายกับคนขอทานที่มีแต่กายเศร้าหมองอิดโรย หน้าตาซูบซีดไม่ผ่องใส พวกนี้ตายแล้วไปอบายภูมิ.

²²⁰ กายมนุษย์ มีรูปร่างลักษณะค่อนข้างผ่องใส เป็นมนุษย์เต็มอัตรา กายมนุษย์นี้ต่างกันบ้างที่ มีส่วนสัณสีผิวพรรณ ขาวดำ สวยสดงดงามไม่เหมือนกัน แต่ลักษณะก็บอกความเป็นมนุษย์ชัดเจน พวกนี้ตายแล้วไปเกิดเป็นมนุษย์อีก.

²²¹ กายทิพย์ คือกายเทวดาชั้นกามาวจร มีลักษณะผ่องใส ละเอียดย่อน ถ้าเป็นเทพชั้นอากาศเทวดา หรือรุกเทวดาขึ้นไป ก็ให้เห็นสวมมงกุฎเพชรพราว เครื่องประดับสวยสดงดงามมาก ท่านพวกนี้ตายแล้วไปเกิดเป็นเทวดาชั้นกามาวจรสวรรค์.

4. *Kai Phrom* [*brahmā* body] has characteristics similar to a *deva*, but with more refined glass-like skin, gold ornaments, glistening in yellow and with a crown. They will be reborn as *brahmās*.²²²

5. *Kai Kaeo* [glass body] or *Kaitham*, which is also called *dhammakāya*. This kind of body belongs to the *arahants*. One sees the whole body glisten, clearer and purer than *Kai Phrom*. The whole body is radiant. When they die, they go to *nibbāna*. (Wira Ṭhāvaro n.d.: 16)²²³

The description of these bodies is very similar to Luang Pho Sot's description of the worldly bodies and *dhammakāya*. In Luang Pho Sot's teachings, *deva* and *brahmā* bodies also consist of ornaments and crowns, and *dhammakāya* is also radiant, appearing like glass or crystal. *Nibbāna*, similarly to Luang Pho Sot's conception, is described as a dwelling place of the Buddhas and *arahants*, which the meditators can visit. In *Manomayiddhi and my biography* (Wira Ṭhāvaro 2011: 28–9), Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam acknowledges Luang Pho Sot as the person who convinced him that *nibbāna* is not annihilation or nothingness. He states that prior to meeting Luang Pho Sot, he learned from various textbooks and monks that *nibbāna* is void, and believed it to be true for many years. However, after meeting various meditation masters, especially Luang Pho Sot, he came to realize that *nibbāna* is a place where the Buddhas and *arahants* reside. When they first met,

²²² กายพรหม มีลักษณะคล้ายเทวดา แต่ผิวกายละเอียดกว่า ใส่คล้ายแก้ว มีเครื่องประดับสีทองล้วน แลดูเหลือแสงแวววาวไปหมด ตลอดจนมงกุฎที่สวมใส่ ท่านพวกนี้ตายไปแล้ว ไปเกิดเป็นพรหม.

²²³ กายแก้ว หรือกายธรรม ที่เรียกว่าธรรมกายก็เรียก กายของท่านประเภทนี้ เป็นกายของพระอรหันต์ จะเห็นเป็นประกายพรึกทั้งองค์ ใส่สะอาดยิ่งกว่ากายพรหม และเป็นประกายทั้งองค์ ท่านพวกนี้ตายแล้วไปนิพพาน.

Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam rejected Luang Pho Sot's opinion and argued that *nibbāna* could never be a place and that *dhammakāyas* of Buddhas and *arahants* in *nibbāna* could never appear like crystal. In the end, after practising Sammā Arahaṃ meditation in conjunction with other methods, Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam was able to visit *nibbāna* and saw the Buddhas and *arahants* exactly as Luang Pho Sot described (Wira Ṭhāvaro 2011: 29).

The appearances of the mind, as in Sammā Arahaṃ meditation, are also something that the meditator must observe in order to comply with the third *satipaṭṭhāna*. In the *Handbook for practicing kammaṭṭhāna*, Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam explains that when the mind is full of anger it becomes black; full of greed, red; full of delusion, the colour of water after washing raw meat; full of worry and restlessness, the colour of water after boiling beans; and white when it is inclined towards blind faith (Wira Ṭhāvaro n.d.: 15 and 17). When the mind is purer and full of wisdom, it will start to shine. The *arahants* appear like 'having a glistening star inside their chests' (Wira Ṭhāvaro n.d.: 17). He goes on to urge his pupils to develop mindfulness and wisdom until the whole sphere completely glistens like the mind of the *arahant*.

The idea of the mind of the *arahant* having the characteristics of permanence (*niccam*), happiness (*sukham*) and self (*attā*) is also found in Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam's teaching. This is mentioned in a compilation of his sermons on the practice of generosity, morality and meditation titled *Travelling dhamma Vol. 3*, published posthumously in 2005.²²⁴ In the

²²⁴ ឥត្រូវសៀវភៅ ទំព័រ ៣. This book is 144 pages long and divided into three sections: 1) generosity (*dāna*); 2) morality (*sīla*); and 3) meditation (*bhāvanā*). The book was published by Wat Tha Sung to be distributed during its Kathina ceremony in 2005. It is a compilation of teachings given on various occasions by Luang

vipassanā part of the meditation section, Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam advises on how to contemplate the impermanence, suffering and not-self of the five aggregates. He emphasizes developing a divine eye to see and contemplate the different organs of the body as ugly and undesirable, and in doing so one would be able to attain *nibbāna* in this very life (Wira Ṭhāvaro 2005: 117). He takes the example of the monk Bāhiya, who was able to attain arahatship immediately after the Buddha instructed him to see *rūpa* (form) as merely *rūpa* (Wira Ṭhāvaro 2005: 117–8).²²⁵ Then he states:

The Buddha says that *rūpa* is impermanent, *rūpa* is suffering. When *rūpa* is impermanent, let it be the concern of *rūpa*. When *rūpa* is suffering, let it be the concern of *rūpa*. The mind must not suffer. In the end, *rūpa* will be *anattā*. Let it also be the concern of *rūpa*. But for the mind, it must be *niccam*, that is, having a permanent object. The mind must be *sukham*, it has the feeling of happiness. The mind is *attā*, that is, having stability. (Wira Ṭhāvaro 2005: 117–8)²²⁶

Although not explicitly stated as such, it is my opinion that in this passage Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam is referring to the supra-mundane *citta*, or the mind that has attained arahatship. The description of the mind as being permanent and happy, and *attā* as referring to the

Pho Ruesi Lingdam, which were collected and edited by Wat Tha Sung into a book. The book can be downloaded from Wat Tha Sung's website: <http://www.thasungmedia.com/wat/puy/ebook/2555/dummasanjon3/files/assets/basic-html/page1.html>

²²⁵ This is taken from Bāhiya Sutta, Ud 6.

²²⁶ พระพุทธเจ้าบอกว่ารูปไม่เที่ยง รูปเป็นทุกข์ เมื่อรูปไม่เที่ยงก็ทำให้มันเป็นเรื่องของรูป รูปมันเป็นทุกข์ ก็ให้มันเป็นเรื่องของรูป ใจเราจงอย่าทุกข์ แล้วในที่สุด รูปมันเป็นอนัตตา ก็ให้มันเป็นเรื่องของรูป สำหรับใจของเราต้องเป็นนิจจัง คือมีอารมณ์เที่ยง ใจของเราให้มันเป็นสุขขัง คือมีอารมณ์ เป็นสุข ใจของเรามันเป็นอัตตา คือมีการทรงตัว.

attainment of *nibbāna*, is similar to Luang Pho Sot's understanding of *dhammakāya* and *nibbāna*. The book does not state the source of this understanding, but it is my opinion that it is mostly likely derived from Luang Pho Sot as this description of *nibbāna* is not found in the teachings of Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam's other teachers such as Luang Pho Niam, Luang Pho Nong and Luang Pho Pan.

3.5.2 Phra Ariyakhunathan (Pusso Seng)

Phra Ariyakhunathan's biographical information from the available sources is brief and patchy. His dates are unknown. Achan Wiwat hardly mentions anything about his life, and his book, *Book of Divine Power*, does not provide any account of it. I have managed to find some information from accounts of his pupil, Achan Phut Ṭhāniyo, from an Internet source.²²⁷ He is described by Achan Phut as a high-ranking Thammayut administrative monk who studied under the tutelage of Saṅgharāja Wachirayanawong, who became the Supreme Patriarch during the reign of Rama VIII, and Phra Upāli Khunupamachan (Chan Siricando), the late abbot of Wat Boromniwat, Bangkok, who ordered the compilation of the Chai Yasothonrat book (Chai 1935). Phra Ariyakhunathan was also a student of Achan Sao Kantasīlo and in the first batch of students of Achan Man with other well-known forest teachers such as Achan Lee Dhammadharo and Achan Chop Ṭhānasamo. When Achan Man died, Phra Ariyakhunathan was responsible for writing Achan Man's first biography, which was distributed at Achan Man's cremation. He is known as the teacher of many monks in Achan Man's forest tradition, including Achan Phut and Achan Sing

²²⁷ Phut (2013).

Khantayāgamo, and also as the author of the book *Book of Divine Power*, which was written with the support of Patriarch Wachirayanawong and Achan Sao. Phra Ariyakhunathan resided at Wat Khao Suan Kwang, Khonkaen province. Towards the end of his life he disrobed, but he continued to reside at Wat Khao Suan Kwang as a lay practitioner. In 1950, as Luang Pho Sot's reputation as a meditation master was quickly spreading, Phra Ariyakhunathan was asked by 'high-ranking Thammayut monks' to investigate the practice and conduct of Luang Pho Sot (Phut 2013). After exchanging ideas and books with Luang Pho Sot, Phra Ariyakhunathan was satisfied with Luang Pho Sot's teaching and behaviour and gave a good report to the Thammayut monks. That same year, Phra Ariyakhunathan wrote a book called *Book of Divine Power* describing *dharmakāya* in the same way as Luang Pho Sot.²²⁸

Book of Divine Power consists of Phra Ariyakhunathan's teaching on how to achieve *thippaya amnat* or attainments of divine power, which refers to the eight kinds of supernatural powers as outlined in the Pāli canon. Phra Ariyakhunathan focuses on mastering the 40 objects of calm meditation and the four *jhānas*, in order to attain these powers. Once all the *jhānas* are mastered, the practitioner then cultivates insight, which leads to the knowledge of the destruction of influxes or cankers (*āsavas*), culminating in the attainment of *nibbāna*.

²²⁸หนังสือวิทยานาจ *Book of Divine Power*, written in Thai by Phra Ariyakhunathan, was published in 1950. Its publisher is omitted. It is 180 pages long.

Visionary experience is a very important factor in the attainment of divine power. Phra Ariyakhunathan (1950: 122–138) devotes a whole chapter to the development of a divine eye. He starts off by listing the different types of seeing that occur through different ‘eyes’, which correspond to different levels of attainments: for example, the ‘eye of wisdom’ (*paññācakkhu*) is able to see reasons and truth behind worldly *dharmas*; the ‘eye of *jhāna*’ is able to see all the *nimittas* that occur in *jhānas*, and past, present and future events; the ‘divine eye’ is able to see all but in a much wider and clearer context; the ‘Dhamma eye’ (*dhammacakkhu*) and the ‘eye of knowledge’ (*ñāṇacakkhu*) are able to see supra-mundane truths such as the three characteristics, etc. (Ariyakhunathan 1950: 122–123). Under the ‘Buddha eye’ (*buddhacakkhu*), which follows the eye of knowledge, Phra Ariyakhunathan explains that this eye belongs to the *arahant* who is able to see all aspects of supra-mundane truths, including the destruction of ignorance and the attainment of *nibbāna*. Moreover, this eye is as pure as the brightest gem, and allows one to ‘see and hear the voices of *phra kaeo*’ or glass Buddha, which he also terms ‘*visuddhidevas*’ or *devas* of purification, namely the Buddhas and *arahants* that have passed away into *nibbāna* (Ariyakhunathan 1950: 123).

Under the section *Insi Kaeo* (Glass Faculties), a description of *dhammakāya* is given (Ariyakhunathan 1950: 167–169). Phra Ariyakhunathan explains that in Theravāda Buddhism, the Buddha is divided into the following three manifestations: ‘*rūpakāya*’, ‘*nāmakāya*’ and ‘*dhammakāya*’ (Ariyakhunathan 1950: 167). *Rūpakāya* is described as the human body born of the Buddha’s mother and father and made up of the four elements. *Nāmakāya* or *kaithip* (*devakāya*) refers to the ‘inner body’ as being much more refined

than the outer body and able to travel outside the outer body as usually happens when someone dies and is reborn (Ariyakhunathan 1950: 168). Lastly, ‘*Dhammakāya*’ is described by Phra Ariyakhunathan as follows:

Phra dhammakāya is the body of pure *dhamma*, and is not for the public, for humans or *devas* [to see]. It refers to the mind that is freed from cankers [*āsava*], the mind that is clean and pure, with bright radiance, like the sun in the sky. *Phra dhammakāya* is the true Buddha. It is the body that is beyond birth, aging, pain, death and all suffering; the permanent and lasting body, which does not decay for all eternity; the gathering place of all *dhammas*. But the Lord did not clearly state its characteristic and appearance.²²⁹

There is also a belief that the *arahants* who attained *nibbāna* still exist as the true *arahants* and do not perish with their bodies, that is, they do not become void. This state of the *arahant* is a type of faculty [*indriya*] called *aññindriya*. The Buddha calls this faculty *wisutthitthep* [*visuddhideva*], which is similar to the state of *visuddhābrahmā* in the Pure Abode, but even more refined. As the *arahants* still possess faculties, they can still benefit others, but those who can gain benefits from them must possess the same

²²⁹ พระธรรมกายได้แก่พระกายธรรมอันบริสุทธิ์ ไม่สาธารณะทั่วไปแก่เทวและมนุษย์ หมายถึงพระจิตที่พ้นจากอาสวะแล้ว เป็นพระจิตบริสุทธิ์ผุดผ่อง มีพระรัศมีแจ่มจ้า เปรียบเหมือนดวงอาทิตย์อุทัยโชติแสงในนภากาศฉะนั้น พระธรรมกายนี้เป็นพระพุทธเจ้าที่จริงแท้ เป็นพระกายที่พ้นเกิด แก่ เจ็บ ตาย และทุกข์โศกทั้งหลายได้จริง เป็นพระกายที่เที่ยงแท้ถาวรไม่สูญสลาย เป็นอยู่ช้านิรันดร์ เป็นที่รวมแห่งธรรมทั้งปวง แต่ท่านมิได้บอกให้แจ้งชัดว่าพระธรรมกายนี้มีรูปพรรณสัณฐานเช่นไรหรือไม่.

faculties in order to sense and see them as the faculties of the *arahants* are most refined. Even the divine eyes of ordinary *devas* cannot see them. So how can an ordinary human with coarse eyes see them? The faculties of the *arahants* are called the ‘glass faculties’ [*insi kaeo*]. Their eyes, ears, noses, tongues, bodies and minds are glass, that is, clear and pure like the radiant gem. Those who attained the glass realm are able to meet and see the glass Buddhas or the *arahants* that attained *nibbāna*. (Ariyakhunathan 1950: 168)²³⁰

Phra Ariyakhunathan’s understanding of *dhammakāya* seems to be derived from various sources, not only from the Pāli texts, but also from his discussions with meditation teachers he had visited over the years, including Achan Man and Luang Pho Sot. The idea of *dhammakāya* as the gathering place of *dhammas* is found in the Pāli commentaries. For example, in Sv III 865 and Spk II 314, *dhammakāya* is equated with nine kinds of supra-mundane *dhammas* (*lokuttaradhamma*) i.e. four paths (*magga*), four fruits (*phala*) and *nibbānadhātu*.²³¹ The idea of past Buddhas and *arahants* still existing as purified minds is mentioned in Achan Maha Boowa’s biography of Achan Man. As I discussed in Chapter 2.3, according to Achan Man, the ‘*vimutti*’ or ‘liberated’ minds of the Buddhas and

²³⁰ ความเชื่อว่าพระอรหันต์นิพพานแล้วยังมีอยู่อีกส่วนหนึ่ง ซึ่งเป็นพระอรหันต์แท้ ไม่สลายไปตามกาย คือความเป็นพระอรหันต์ไม่สูญเสีย ความเป็นพระอรหันต์นี้ท่านก็จัดเป็นอินทรีย์ชนิดหนึ่ง เรียกว่าอัญญอินทรีย์ พระผู้มีพระภาคเจ้าคงหมายถึงเอาอินทรีย์นี้เอง บัญญัติเรียกว่าวิสุทธิเทพ เป็นสภาพที่คล้ายคลึงกับวิสุทธิพรหมในสุทธาวาสชั้นสูง แต่บริสุทธิ์ยิ่งกว่าเท่านั้น เมื่อมีอินทรีย์อยู่ก็ย่อมจะบำเพ็ญประโยชน์ได้ แต่ผู้จะรับประโยชน์จากท่านได้ ก็จะต้องมีอินทรีย์ผ่องแผ้วพอที่จะรับรู้รับเห็นได้ เพราะอินทรีย์ของพระอรหันต์ประณีตสุขุมที่สุด แม้แต่ตาติพย์ของเทวดาสามัญก็มองไม่เห็น มนุษย์สามัญซึ่งมีตาหยาบๆ จะเห็นได้อย่างไร อินทรีย์ของพระอรหันต์นั้นแหละเรียกว่า อินทรีย์แก้ว ตาหูจมูกลิ้นกายใจของท่านเป็นแก้ว คือใสบริสุทธิ์ดั่งแก้วมณีโชติ ผู้บรรลุถึงภูมิแก้วแล้ว ย่อมสามารถพบเห็นพระแก้วคือพระอรหันต์ที่นิพพานแล้วได้.

²³¹ The four paths and fruits are the attainments of each of the noble ones (*ariyapuggala*): the path and fruit of the stream enterer (*sotāpanna*), the path and fruit of the once returner (*sakadāgāmi*), the path and fruit of the non-returner (*anāgāmi*) and the path and fruit of the *arahant*.

arahants have ‘an individual brightness’, still in some way remain after they have entered *parinibbāna* and can assume a conventional form in order to come into contact with the awakened ones who still possess the five aggregates.

Some of Phra Ariyakhunathan’s understandings that may have been influenced or inspired by Luang Pho Sot and Sammā Arahaṃ meditation include: 1) the existence of inner bodies within the human body, 2) the idea of *dhammakāya* as the glass Buddha, and 3) the attainment of the glass realm. The *deva* body within the human body corresponds to the celestial body in Sammā Arahaṃ meditation. The ideas of *dhammakāya* as *phra kaeo* or glass Buddha, radiant, pure and eternal, which one can see, and *nibbāna* as a glass realm, which one can visit, also bear similarities to Luang Pho Sot’s conceptions of *dhammakāya* appearing like crystal, and *āyatana* (*nibbāna*) as the dwelling place of the enlightened ones’ *dhammakāyas*. However, Luang Pho Sot does not use the term *wisutthithev* and does not equate it with *dhammakāya*.

In *Book of Divine Power*, Phra Ariyakhunathan neither mentions nor acknowledges Luang Pho Sot and Sammā Arahaṃ meditation as an influence. It is possible that he could have obtained these ideas from *borān kammaṭṭhāna* sources as the practice of attaining inner bodies is also found in a number of *borān kammaṭṭhāna* texts including the Saṅgharāja Suk Kai Thuean’s meditation system. The term *wisutthithev* echoes the statement in the Wat Pradusongtham manual in the Chai Yasothonrat anthology regarding the mind that attains ‘the *deva* state’ that is described as having the ‘knowledge that knows all’ (*sabbaññutañāṇa*) and ‘a form (*rūpa*) that is inconceivable (*acinteyya*), luminescent and

clear’ (Chai 1935: 277). The idea of the attainment of the glass realm where one could see the Buddha is also found in several *borān kammaṭṭhāna* texts. For example, Kitchai Urkasame’s PhD thesis (2013) discusses a text titled ‘*Buddhanorakan*’ from Wat Bodhi Sri, Mahasarakam province, dated 1923, which describes *nibbāna* as ‘the glass/crystal city’ and ‘a comfortable and peaceful place entirely free from sensations of suffering’ and a place where ‘one could see the Buddha’ (Kitchai 2013: 78–79).

3.5.3 *Bhikṣuṇī* Voramai Kabilsingh

Another well-known figure not within the Sammā Arahaṃ lineage whose practice and teaching have been influenced by Luang Pho Sot and Sammā Arahaṃ meditation was *Bhikṣuṇī* Voramai Kabilsingh (1908–2003).²³² Achan Voramai or, as she is affectionately called by her disciples, Luang Ya (Venerable Grandmother) was the first Thai woman to receive ordination from both the male and the female *saṅgha*. She founded Thailand’s first *bhikṣuṇī* temple, the Songdhammakalyani monastery²³³ in Muang District, Nakorn Pathom, and became the monastery’s first abbess. Although she did not ordain in the Theravāda lineage, her work paved the way for the recent establishment of a fully ordained Theravāda *bhikṣuṇī* movement in Thailand led by her daughter, Achan Chatsumarn Kabilsingh (*Bhikkhunī* Dhammananda).

²³² วรสมัย กบิลสิงห์. This is how she spells her name in the Roman alphabet. Biographical accounts and meditation teachings are taken from วิปัสสนา ๕ แบบ (*Five types of vipassanā*) published in 2003. It is 640 pages long and divided into three parts: 1) Achan Voramai’s biography and published works compiled by Achan Chatsumarn Kabilsingh; 2) the longest section, which consists of Achan Voramai’s own accounts of her experience practising five types of meditation and the teachings she obtained; and 3) a compilation of condolence notes from friends, students and family collected at her funeral.

²³³ Translated as ‘the place where women practise the Dhamma’. This is how the temple spells its name in the Roman alphabet.

Achan Voramai became *sāmaṇerī* in 1956 at Wat Bowonniwet, Bangkok. Her preceptor at Wat Bowonniwet was Phra Phromuni Phin Suvaco. Achan Phin Suvaco, then the temple's deputy abbot, was a scholarly monk who was interested in *vipassanā* meditation. He is widely known as being the act-announcing teacher (*kammavācācāriya*) and caretaker of King Bhumibol (Rama IX) when the king was ordained and resided at the temple in 1956 for 15 days. Achan Phin played a crucial role in bringing about a certain amount of acceptance for her among the Thai Sangha elites. When Achan Voramai established Songdhammakalyani monastery in 1960; the District Chief Officer of Muang district, Nakhon Pathom, summoned her and made a complaint to the Thai Saṅgha Supreme Council accusing her of imitating and dressing up as a monk, which was a criminal offence under the law. Achan Phin, who was a member of the council at the time, informed the council that it was he who ordained her (as a *sāmaṇerī*) and that she was not trying to impersonate a monk as she opted to wear light yellow robes, a colour that Thai monks were not allowed to wear. Having been assured by Achan Phin, the Thai Saṅgha Supreme Council decided that Achan Voramai did not cause any harm to the order (Voramai 2003: 50). As I shall discuss in the next chapter, Achan Phin Suvaco's understanding of *deva* bodies and *dhammakāya* bears similarities to Luang Pho Sot's. It is possible that Achan Voramai discussed Luang Pho Sot's teachings with Achan Phin or even taught him Sammā Arahaṃ meditation. In 1971, prompted by her daughter, Achan Chatsumarn, Achan Voramai travelled to Taiwan and received *bhikṣuṇī* ordination in the Dharmaguptaka lineage at Sung San temple, Taipei. Her preceptor, Professor Tao An Fashi, gave her the monastic name of Ta Tao Fa Tzu, translated as Mahābodhi Dhammācāriya of the Śākya

lineage (Voramai 2003: 52).²³⁴ Achan Chatsumarn later followed her mother's footsteps and received her *bhikkhunī* ordination in Sri Lanka in 2003.

Achan Voramai met Luang Pho Sot at the age of 46, before she became a *sāmaṇerī*. As described in her biography, her introduction to Sammā Arahaṃ meditation was a pivotal point of her life, a kind of spiritual calling, which eventually led her to become interested in Dhamma practice (Voramai 2003: 36). Prior to meeting Luang Pho Sot, Achan Voramai was working in Bangkok as a journalist, and was responsible for raising four children by herself. In 1954, she was diagnosed with a uterine fibroid (tumour). As she was about to undergo surgery at Chulalongkorn Hospital, her sister paid her a visit and brought along *mae chi* Thongsuk, Luang Pho Sot's leading meditation student. *Mae chi* Thongsuk consoled her, went back to Wat Paknam and, having informed Luang Pho Sot of her condition, came back to see her the next day and conveyed a message from him that she no longer needed the operation as he had already removed the fibroid in meditation. Back then, Achan Voramai did not have that much faith in the supernatural, so she told the doctors to go ahead with the surgery. To her and the surgeons' complete surprise, they did not find any fibroid in her uterus (Voramai 2003: 33–34). This incident led her to become interested in Sammā Arahaṃ meditation and its healing practice. As soon she had recovered from her surgery, she went to Wat Paknam, started training in meditation under Luang Pho Sot and *mae chi* Thongsuk and, in September that year, was able to attain *dhammakāya* and meditate to cure illnesses (Voramai 2003: 40).

²³⁴ มหาโพธิธรรมาจารย์วงศ์สาภยะ.

Achan Voramai did not practice Sāmmā Arahaṃ exclusively. After she completed her training at Wat Paknam, she went on to study other meditation systems. These included Rise and Fall meditation at Wat Mahathat; *vipassanā* meditation at Wat Bowonniwet with her preceptor, Achan Phin Suvaco; and *ānāpānasati* (Buddho) meditation at Wat Asokaram, Samut Prakan, with Achan Lee Dhammadharo. With the Rise and Fall method, she did not study directly with Achan Chodok, but with his students Phra Palat Thuan and Phra Achan Thiap (Voramai 2003: 121). Achan Lee was one of Achan Man Bhūridatta's leading disciples. His meditation technique, like that of Achan Man, is based on mindfulness of breath and recitation of the word *Buddho*. Achan Voramai also studied healing with Achan Lee. In her short description of his teachings, Achan Voramai mentions that as part of her *samatha* training, Achan Lee taught her to master the 'wind' (*lom*) in order to use it to cure one's own and others' illnesses (Voramai 2003: 341). As I mentioned above, the mastering of *lom* for healing purposes is also taught in Saṅgharāja Suk Kai Thuean's system. Although her *Buddho* training was mainly with Achan Lee, she also studied this method with Luang Pho Choi Khemiyo at Tham Mangkon, Kanchanaburi. Achan Phin's *vipassanā* meditation, as described by Achan Voramai, is based on the Four Foundations of Mindfulness but does not incorporate observing the rise and fall of the abdomen, as the Rise and Fall method. She also acknowledges Phra Ariyakhunathan (Pusso Seng) as one of her teachers (Voramai 2003: 342).

Achan Voramai's reason for studying many different techniques and how she understood the differences between these meditation systems are summarized in *Dhamma garland 3*, a book consisting of a compilation of questions and answers regarding Dhamma practice

that was previously published in her monthly magazine *Vipassanā Banthoengsan*.²³⁵ In response to a question about which of the three meditation methods (Buddho, Sammā Arahaṃ or Rise and Fall) one should practice, Achan Voramai advises that ‘if one would like to meditate for cessation [ดับ], one should practise Rise and Fall; if one wants to practise *ānāpānasati*, one should practise Buddho, and if one wants to attain *dhammākāya*, one should choose Sammā Arahaṃ. However, in order to become a well-learned person (*bahussutā*), one should study all of them’ (Voramai 2003: 33).

She further elaborates that there are four types of *arahants*. Each type is named after the *arahant’s* respective attainments: 1) *paṭisambhidāpatta* (one who has attained the discriminations); 2) *chaḷabhiñña* (one who has six higher knowledges); 3) *tevijja* (one who has three knowledges); and 4) *sukkhavipassaka* (one whose insight is dry). The first type of *arahant* has mastered the four analytical knowledges or discriminations (*paṭisambhidā*), namely: 1) knowledge of meaning (*atthapaṭisambhidā*); 2) knowledge of conditions (*dhammapaṭisambhidā*); 3) knowledge of the modes of language expression (*niruttipaṭisambhidā*); and 4) knowledge of readiness in speech (*paṭibhāṇapaṭisambhidā*). The second type is the *arahant* who has acquired the six higher knowledges (*abhiñña*): 1) supernatural powers (*iddhi*); 2) divine ear (*dibbasota*); 3) mind-reading ability (*cetopariyañña*); 4) recollection of past lives (*pubbenivāsānussati*); 5) divine eye (*dibbacakkhu*) and 6) cessation of mental intoxicants (*āsavakkhaya*). The third type is the *arahant* who has obtained the three knowledges (*vijjā*): 1) recollection of past lives; 2) divine eye; and 3) cessation of mental intoxicants. And the last type of *arahant* is the one

²³⁵ มาลัยธรรม ๓ and วิปัสสนาบัณฑิตสาร.

who is liberated through dry insight and does not possess any of the above knowledges and powers.²³⁶ Achan Voramai states that both Buddhō and Sammā Arahaṃ methods, which begin with *samatha* and end with *vipassanā*, enable the practitioner to become the first three types of *arahants* (Voramai 2016: 35–37). These types require one to practise *samatha* meditation in order to acquire the worldly knowledges first (Voramai 2016: 35–37), whereas Rise and Fall enables one to reach cessation quickly and become the fourth type of *arahant*, the one who is liberated through dry insight (Voramai 2016: 35–37). This categorization of different types of *arahants*, not uncommon among the teachings of Thai forest monks, is also found in Achan Voramai’s teacher, Achan Lee’s, first book, *The craft of the heart*, whose understanding she had most likely adopted (Lee Dhammadharo 2009: 94–95).²³⁷ Achan Lee lists the four *arahants* and their respective attainments and goes on further to elaborate on the amount of *samatha* and *vipassanā* involved for each type: 1) the dry-insight *arahants* developed *vipassanā* more than *samatha*; 2) the *tevijja arahants*

²³⁶ The terms *paṭisambhidāpatta*, *chalabhiñña* and *tevijja* reference standard *nikāya* lists and are used quite regularly in the commentaries. Both the three knowledges and the six higher knowledges are listed in, for example, the Saṅgīti Sutta (D III 207) and Dasuttara Sutta (D III 271). Similarly to the list of the eight higher knowledges and powers, the first five of the six *abhiññās* and the first two of the three *vijjās* are worldly attainments, whereas the sixth of the six *abhiññās* and the third of the three *vijjās*, namely, the knowledge of the cessation of mental intoxicants (*āsavakkhayañāṇa*), is the only one necessary for the attainment of *nibbāna* and is acquired through the development of insight (*vipassanā*). The four *paṭisambhidās* are not mentioned in the first three of the five *nikāyas* of the Suttanta Piṭaka, but are found in the Aṅguttara and Khuddaka Nikāya, such as Vādī Sutta (A II 138) and Paṭisambhidāpatta Sutta (A III 113). *Sukkhavipassaka*, translated as ‘practitioner of dry insight’, is a commentarial term that denotes one who practises insight meditation without attaining *jhānas* or access concentration as a basis for their *vipassanā*: for example, see Vism 702 (XXIII 18). A list of the four types of *arahant* is found in the Theragāthā commentary (Th-a III 208–09) (Rupert Gethin, May 25, 2017, e-mail message to the author). However, I have not been able to find the references with the precise proportions of *samatha* and *vipassanā* with regard to the four types of *arahants*.

²³⁷ จิตตวิชา (Cittavijjā) was first published in 1939. It is 109 pages long and divided into two parts. The first part concerns the practice of morality (pp. 5–38) and the second meditation (pp. 39–109). The two parts were originally published separately but were later compiled and edited into a single book. It aims to provide a comprehensive overview of all aspects of morality, lay precepts, and *samatha* and *vipassanā* meditation based on the Buddhō *ānāpānasati* method. Thanissaro Bhikkhu translated the title of this book into English as *The craft of the heart*. The third edition of the English version, published in 2009, can be downloaded from this website: <http://www.accesstoinight.org/lib/thai/lee/index.html#craft>

developed an equal amount of *samatha* and *vipassanā*; 3) the *chaḷabhiñña arahants* developed two parts *samatha* to one part *vipassanā*; and 4) the *paṭisambhidāpatta arahants* developed three parts *samatha* to one part *vipassanā* (Lee Dhammadharo 2009: 95). These four types are also discussed in much detail in Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam's *Handbook for practising kammaṭṭhāna* (Wira Ṭhāvaro n.d.: 1–52). The different types of *arahants* and their respective paths and attainments seem to be used by some *samatha-vipassanā*-based meditation teachers partly to explain the many different types of meditation practices available and partly to clarify their *samatha* practice and justify it against the criticisms of dry-insight practitioners.

After she had completed the 28-day course at Wat Mahathat, she went to Wat Paknam to visit Luang Pho Sot who enquired whether she had managed to retain her *dhammakāya* while practising Rise and Fall. She informed him that while at Wat Mahathat, she only used her human body to meditate, and had placed her *dhammakāya* at the top of her head so that her *dhammakāya* would not disappear during her training (Voramai 2003: 217).²³⁸ Luang Pho Sot was pleased with her answer and instructed her to always keep her *dhammakāya* as it is something that 'cannot be bought' (Voramai 2003: 217).

In my interview with Achan Chatsumarn at Songdhammakalyani monastery, she informed me that Achan Voramai incorporated all meditation methods she studied into her practice

²³⁸ In Sammā Arahaṇ meditation, those who have reached *dhammakāya*, but have not abandoned the three lower fetters (*saṃyojana*) and become stream-enterers (*sotāpanna*), are called *gotrabhū* persons. *Gotrabhū* persons can fall back on their attainments and become ordinary persons (*puthujjana*) (Sermchai 2017).

(Chatsumarn 2017).²³⁹ She continued to teach and practise Sammā Arahaṃ along with other systems for the rest of her life (Chatsumarn 2017). Sammā Arahaṃ meditation became particularly useful when she needed to heal the sick (Chatsumarn 2017). In my opinion, her understanding of *dhammakāya* seems to be the product of her studies both at Wat Paknam and Sung San temple, Taipei. In *Five types of vipassanā*, Achan Voramai states that the meditation method of reaching *dhammakāya* existed in the Buddhayāna, i.e. Mahāyāna, a tradition for more than a thousand years, but in Thailand it was Luang Pho Sot who first introduced it (Voramai 2003: 217). She describes the Buddha's *dhammakāya* as 'the body and awakened *citta* of the Buddha residing in *nibbāna*', which she terms the 'Buddha field' (Sanskrit: *buddhakṣetra*) (Voramai 2003: 214). 'He [the Buddha] has abandoned everything, but still acknowledges that the current dispensation is due to his *pāramī*' (Voramai 2546: 214 and 454). *Buddhakṣetra* is an important term in Mahāyāna *sūtras* such as Sukhāvatīvyūha Sūtra and Saddharmapuṇḍarīka Sūtra (Lotus Sutra) to refer to spiritual realms of celestial Buddhas such as Amitābha. It is a central concept in Pure Land Buddhism, a broad branch within the Mahāyāna tradition popular in East Asia. Her explanation of the Buddha's *dhammakāya* as the body and mind of the Buddha residing in *nibbāna* is, of course, derived from Luang Pho Sot and Sammā Arahaṃ meditation. Achan Voramai also understood the practice of *satipaṭṭhānas*, similarly to Luang Pho Sot, as referring to the inner bodies and minds as well as the human body and mind (Voramai 2003: 280). However, she extends the scope of her mindfulness to include the bodies and minds of her previous lives as part of her *satipaṭṭhāna* practice as well (Voramai 2003: 280).

²³⁹ February 28, 2017.

Moreover, Achan Chatsumarn (2017) informed me that her mother was close to Achan Sermchai. He was very supportive of her and her mother's ordinations. Achan Sermchai visited Achan Voramai when she was terminally ill, attended her funeral and wrote a condolence message for her. After that, Achan Chatsumarn visited Achan Sermchai at Wat Luang Pho Sot Thammakayaram every year until his death. During those visits, Achan Sermchai honoured her by letting her sit at the same table as monks, a treatment which is still regarded as usual for *bhikkhunī* in Thailand (Chatsumarn 2017).

Chapter Four

4. Achan Sermchai's development of Sammā Arahaṃ meditation

This chapter provides a summary and analysis of Phra Thep Yan Mongkhon's (Achan Sermchai Jayamaṅgalo) works. As the previous chapter has shown, Achan Sermchai was a member of the third-generation Sammā Arahaṃ meditation teachers who inherited the tradition in 1971 from Phra Ratchaphromathen (Wira Gaṇuttamo), the late deputy abbot of Wat Paknam, 55 years after Luang Pho Sot first developed the method. At that time, Thai Buddhism had long felt the impact of the 19th and 20th century monastic reforms, and many traditional forms of meditation had died out or greatly declined. Sammā Arahaṃ meditation, however, demonstrates the opposite of this trend of decline and disappearance and has been gaining more and more practitioners thanks to the propagation efforts by Luang Pho Sot and his successors, Wat Paknam's abbots, Saṅgharāja Ariyawongsakatayan (Somdet Pun Puṇṇasiri) and Somdet Phra Ratchamangkhlachan (Chuang Varapuṇṇo), and also by its monks and its *mae chi* meditation teachers. The second half of the twentieth century saw the emergence and popularization of Burmese Rise and Fall and other *vipassanā* methods tailored for modern practitioners and developed for the masses. The relationships between the different Burmese *vipassanā* lineages and Sammā Arahaṃ tradition have mostly been silent, displaying a lack of interest, and on occasions openly critical, as Burmese *vipassanā* teachers and practitioners view Sammā Arahaṃ meditation as *samatha* and not in accordance with the practice of *satipaṭṭhānas* in the Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta, which they see as the 'only path' to *nibbāna*. Moreover, the last

few decades of the twentieth century witnessed the expansion of the Dhammakaya Temple, which started with a small group of meditation practitioners headed by *mae chi* Chan, a student of Luang Pho Sot and *mae chi* Thongsuk Samdaengpan, and her pupils. Over the course of only three decades, the Dhammakaya Temple became one of the biggest and richest temples in the world. The temple has greatly contributed to the fame and reputation of Luang Pho Sot among followers in Thailand and abroad and stirred up interest in Sammā Arahaṃ meditation among the masses. However, its fund-raising techniques, grandeur, teachings and ties with Thaksin Shinawatra, the ousted prime minister and tycoon, have been subject to constant criticisms from Pāli scholars, high-ranking Buddhist monks, the media, and those who opposed the Shinawatra clan's political network and the red-shirt movement. Although the media concentrated on its marketing, fund-raising and the embezzlement charge levelled against its abbot, Phra Dhammajayo, criticisms of its teachings, especially meditation techniques and its views on *nibbāna* as self (*attā*), were also raised and affected the wider Sammā Arahaṃ tradition. Not all of these criticisms were new, as shown above, and during Luang Pho Sot's lifetime, Sammā Arahaṃ meditation was criticized by Pāli scholars and Burmese *vipassanā* teachers, which culminated in Somdet Phra Phuthachan (At Āsabhamahāthera), one of the highest-ranking Buddhist monks at the time, sending Phra Thamthiraratmahamuni (Achan Chodok Ñāṇasiddhi) to Wat Paknam to teach the Rise and Fall method to Luang Pho Sot.²⁴⁰ However, with the nationwide and even international coverage of the mounting public attacks on the Dhammakaya Temple and its abbot around the year 1999 and continuing criticism over the

²⁴⁰ For criticisms during Luang Pho Sot's lifetime, see *63 sermons* (1984: (26)–(28)) and Tritha (1984: 76). For the account of Achan Chodok's visit to Wat Paknam and teaching Luang Pho Sot, see Young Buddhists Association of Thailand (2008: 26).

next 15 years, the prospects of other, much smaller Sammā Arahaṃ lineages and their survival were greatly affected.²⁴¹ Achan Sermchai, who established Wat Luang Pho Sot Thammakayaram in 1991, 13 years after the establishment of Dhammakaya Temple, witnessed these events, and as a result began giving sermons and publishing books defending Sammā Arahaṃ meditation. One of his first books, a systematic and scholastic defence of Sammā Arahaṃ meditation, was *The Four Noble Truths*.²⁴² It was published in 1995 by the Dhammakaya Buddhist Meditation Foundation, a foundation affiliated with Wat Luang Pho Sot, under the name of Phra Phawanawisutthikhun, Achan Sermchai's former monastic title. The introduction and preface to this book state that the content of book was developed from sermons given in 1994 at Wat Luang Pho Sot and previously published in Wat Luang Pho Sot's *Dhammakāya Magazine* (Volumes 33-35) in 1995 (Sermchai 1995: 5-12). This book became the starting point for his later works.

Achan Sermchai's works can be described as apologetic in their systematic usage of Pāli canonical and commentarial texts to provide a defence of Luang Pho Sot's Sammā Arahaṃ meditation. This defence was not begun by Achan Sermchai, however, but by Luang Pho Sot himself, and was continued by Achan Sermchai, who not only provided further Pāli canonical statements but also statements arguing that his tradition conforms to Pāli

²⁴¹ For recent criticisms by Thai scholars of Buddhism, see, for example, Payutto (1999: 233), Prawet Wasi (1999: 58-59) and Sathianphong Wannapok (2015). For discussions regarding the 1999 *nibbāna* debates and controversy, see Potprecha (2009: Chapter 2), Mackenzie (2007: 98–102) and Scott (2009: 147–149).

²⁴² อริยสัจ ๔ The 160-page book is divided into eight chapters: 1) *Dukkhasacca* [the truth of suffering], 2) *Samudayasacca* [the truth of the cause of suffering], 3) *Nirodhasacca* [the truth of the cessation of suffering], 4) *Maggasacca* [the truth of the path leading to the end of suffering], 5) Characteristics of complete realization, 6) The highest search: the search for *nibbāna* that is beyond birth, aging, pain and death, 7) *Nibbāna* is a state that is happy, permanent and supremely void, 8) How is *nibbāna* void and empty of *attā*?, and 9) The eternal words of teachers who are *supaṭipannos*. The book also consists of an appendix of questions and answers regarding *nibbāna*.

commentaries, subcommentaries and the views of respected Thai monks. In his elaboration of Luang Pho Sot's teachings, Achan Sermchai's works can also be characterized as an attempt to reinterpret and systematize Sammā Arahaṃ meditation. This can be seen clearly in his development of the three aspects of *nibbāna* and the four-tier *satipaṭṭhāna* practice. Achan Sermchai took various ideas found in Luang Pho Sot's teachings and linked them to canonical and commentarial terms and passages, elaborating them, and where necessary reinterpreting and redefining them, while at the same time trying not to deviate from what he saw as the essence of Luang Pho Sot's Sammā Arahaṃ meditation.

This chapter provides a summary and an analysis of four main works by Achan Sermchai:

1. *Samatha vipassanā meditation in accordance with the Four Foundations of Mindfulness to reach dhammakāyas and nibbāna.*²⁴³ This book provides the most up-to-date and complete explanation of Achan Sermchai's elaboration, systemization and reinterpretation of various aspects of Sammā Arahaṃ meditation. The whole book, especially the second chapter, argues that Sammā Arahaṃ meditation consists of both *samatha* and *vipassanā* techniques, and is consistent with *satipaṭṭhānas* and the Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta, the stages of purification in Buddhaghosa's Visuddhimagga (Path of Purification) etc. It outlines in

²⁴³ สมถะวิปัสสนากัมมัฏฐานตามแนวสติปัฏฐาน ๔ ถึงธรรมกายและพระนิพพาน. This book, compiled and written by Phra Ratanwisit (Achan Sermchai's former monastic title), was published in 2010 by Wat Luang Pho Sot Thammakayaram and was translated into English and published in 2011. The Thai version consists of 238 pages and is divided into an introduction and three chapters: 1). *Samatha* and *anupassanā* level; 2) *Vipassanā* level; and 3) Attainment of *magga-phala* level. The first chapter consists of Achan Sermchai's description and elaboration of the preliminary stages and the 18 bodies of Sammā Arahaṃ meditation. The second chapter talks about how to practise Sammā Arahaṃ meditation in accordance with the Four Foundations of Mindfulness and explains Achan Sermchai's practice of four-tier *satipaṭṭhāna* in Sammā Arahaṃ meditation. The last chapter covers the three knowledges (*vijjā*), the penetration of the Four Noble Truths and the attainment of *nibbāna*.

detail the four-tier *satipaṭṭhāna* practice. In many places, it cites the views of respected Thai monks in order to support its arguments.

2. *Answering questions regarding Dhamma practice*.²⁴⁴ This book, published in 1999, provides additional information on Achan Sermchai's elaboration, systemization and reinterpretation of various aspects of Sammā Arahaṃ meditation. It also provides his answers to the questions regarding Rise and Fall and other meditation methods and also the practice of purifying food and offering it to the Buddha in *nibbāna*, which will be discussed in detail below.

3. *Handbook for the study of the three trainings*.²⁴⁵ The appendix to this textbook (pages 355–405) provides the most detailed explanation of Achan Sermchai's understanding of the three aspects of *nibbāna*. It is an attempt to elaborate and reinterpret Luang Pho Sot's understanding of *dharmakāya*, *nibbāna* and *āyatana (nibbāna)* and link these concepts to various terms and passages in the Pāli canon and the commentaries and subcommentaries. The views of respected Thai monks are also cited.

²⁴⁴ ตอบปัญหาธรรมปฏิบัติ. This 636-page book is published by Wat Luang Pho Sot Thammakayaram, Ratchaburi. It is a compilation of Achan Sermchai's answers to various Dhamma-related questions previously published in *Dhammakāya Magazine*. The answers are grouped together into nine sections: 1) General; 2) Merit-making and transference; 3) *Vinaya*; 4) *Kamma*; 5) Sammā Arahaṃ meditation; 6) Basic Dhamma practice; 7) Intermediate Dhamma practice; 8) Advance Dhamma practice; and 9) *Nibbāna*.

²⁴⁵ คู่มือการศึกษาสัมมาปฏิบัติไตรสิกขา. This book, compiled and written by Phra Ratyanwisit and others, was first published in 2009 by the National Coordination Centre of the Provincial Meditation Institute of Thailand and was translated into English and published in 2010 as *A Study Guide for Right Practice of the Three Trainings*. The aim of this book is to act as a standard guide to the practice of morality, meditation and wisdom in accordance with the Pāli canonical texts and the Visuddhimagga and to be distributed nationwide. The Thai version consists of 439 pages and is divided into three chapters: 1) Higher morality; 2) Higher meditation; and 3) Higher wisdom. The part that I shall concentrate on is the appendix between pages 355 and 405, titled 'Three aspects of *nibbāna*' by Achan Sermchai, which consists of his most up-to-date elaboration and interpretation of the three aspects of *nibbāna*.

The contents of these three books overlap in many parts. However, I will rely on *Samatha vipassanā meditation* and *Answering questions regarding Dhamma practice* in my summary and analysis of Achan Sermchai's thought on Sammā Arahaṃ meditation and the four-tier *satipaṭṭhāna* practice (Chapters 4.1 and 4.2). The appendix to *The handbook for the study of the three trainings* is the main focus for Achan Sermchai's understanding of the three aspects of *nibbāna* (4.4). *Samatha vipassanā meditation* and *The handbook for the study of the three trainings* both have English translations, which are substantially the same as the Thai versions. My summaries and analyses have relied on the original Thai versions. I also incorporate material from my five-hour and three-hour interviews with Achan Sermchai at Wat Luang Pho Sot Thammakayaram on 9 June 2015 and 27 March 2017.

4.1 Linking the various stages of Sammā Arahaṃ meditation to the Pāli texts

In order to counter claims that Sammā Arahaṃ meditation is heterodox, does not consist of *vipassanā* and/or that Luang Pho Sot invented it without consulting the Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta and other Pāli 'orthodox' sources, Achan Sermchai, since the publication of *Four Noble Truths*, has introduced various arguments backed by Pāli canonical and commentarial references to support the Theravāda textual validity of Sammā Arahaṃ meditation. Some of these arguments were developed by Achan Sermchai himself, others have been taken from teachings of his mentor, Phra Ratchaphromathen, and high-

ranking Thai monks such as Phra Phrom Muni (Phin Suvaco), the late abbot of Wat Bowonniwet Vihāra, as mentioned below.

The negative view of Sammā Arahaṃ meditation developed during the time of Luang Pho Sot. For example, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu wrote a book titled *Anattā of the Buddha* arguing that *nibbāna* is *anattā* (not-self).²⁴⁶ It was first published in 1939, 23 years after Luang Pho Sot developed Sammā Arahaṃ meditation and during the period when it was gaining more and more popularity at Wat Paknam. One of the arguments the book raises is that the idea of *nibbāna* as *attā* (self) bears similarities to the idea of *ātman* in the Bhagavad-gītā, and that those who state this are contradicting the Buddha and bringing the Hindu view into Buddhism (Buddhadasa 1999: 66). Although Buddhadasa did not state whose view he was refuting, it is my opinion that Luang Pho Sot's view was one of them.²⁴⁷ Many such criticisms resurfaced during the Dhammakaya Temple controversies in 1999. For example, one of the most well-respected Thai monks and scholars of Buddhism, Somdet Phra Buddhaghosācāriya (Prayudh Payutto), in *Dhammakaya case* (1999: 233) claimed that the Dhammakaya Temple was guilty of distorting the teaching of the Buddha in propagating the following ideas: 1) that *nibbāna* is *attā*; 2) that the *nimittas* (mental images) of *dhammakāya* that are *attā* of Buddhas dwell in *āyatana* (*nibbāna*); and 3) that *āyatana* (*nibbāna*) is a land where one can visit the Buddhas in *samādhi*.²⁴⁸ The Pāli scholar Sathianphong Wannapok, who is a professor at Mahachulalongkorn Buddhist University, wrote several tracts in 1999 criticizing the Dhammakaya Temple. In *Dhammakaya case*:

²⁴⁶ อนัตตาของพระพุทธเจ้า.

²⁴⁷ For further discussions, see Potprecha (2009: Chapters 1 and 3).

²⁴⁸ กรณิธรรมกาย.

Lessons for Buddhists,²⁴⁹ published in 1999, Sathianphong (1999: 80) attacks Sammā Arahaṃ meditation for teaching that ‘in order to reach *nibbāna*, one merely has to visualize a crystal ball until it becomes a *nimitta* of a Buddha image [...] without any need to eradicate defilements [...] They also teach the alien concept, which does not exist in Buddhism, that *nibbāna* is an eternal city, the dwelling place of Buddhas and *arahants*, whose size can be measured’. The respected thinker and social critic Prawet Wasi (1999: 58–59), in *Dhammakaya cult and the roles of Thai society*, criticizes the practice of visualizing *nimittas* as not leading to *nibbāna*, and advises the practitioners of Sammā Arahaṃ meditation to overcome their attachments to *nimittas* and progress further by way of insight (*vipassanā*).²⁵⁰ In 2015, when the Dhammakaya Temple was again under attack for receiving donations from the chairman of Klongchan Credit Union Cooperative who was under criminal investigation for embezzlement, Sathianphong wrote a number of articles published in the *Mathichon* newspaper and on its website attacking the Dhammakaya Temple and Sammā Arahaṃ meditation. In an article titled ‘The original *dhātudhamma dhammakāya*’, published on 2 March 2015, Sathianphong (2015) states that at first Luang Pho Sot thought that Sammā Arahaṃ meditation ‘was the real thing’ but later ‘he got stuck’ without making any progress in meditation and had to consult ‘a well-known *vipassanā* teacher’ who guided him through this ‘dead end’.²⁵¹ According to Sathianphong (2015), Sammā Arahaṃ meditation is thus ‘a damaged inheritance’ that ‘the owner has abandoned’. This incident is, of course, Wat Mahathat’s and the Rise and Fall tradition’s

²⁴⁹ บทเรียนชาวพุทธจากกรณีธรรมกาย.

²⁵⁰ สัทธิธรรมกายกับบทบาทของสังคมไทย.

²⁵¹ ธรรมกายต้นธาตุต้นธรรม.

version of the visit by Achan Chodok Ñāṇasiddhi to teach Luang Pho Sot the Rise and Fall method at Wat Paknam.

As this research has shown, Luang Pho Sot, in developing Sammā Arahaṃ meditation, did consult the Pāli canon, especially the *satipaṭṭhāna* practice in the Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta, which he also believed constituted the ‘only path’ to *nibbāna* (see Saman 2000: 210–223). Luang Pho Sot was also familiar with Visuddhimagga and often mentioned practices and attainments deriving from it, for example in his elaboration of the six realms of insight (*vipassanābhūmi*) as mentioned in the second chapter (*Compilation of Dhamma sermons* 2012: 324–6).

In *Samatha vipassanā meditation*, Achan Sermchai seeks to emphasize and elaborate on this scriptural-based aspect of Luang Pho Sot’s teaching in order to counter these criticisms. Luang Pho Sot, in his meditation teachings, often talks about the two preliminary techniques: 1) *parikamma nimitta* (preparatory/preliminary sign), the visualization of a crystal sphere; and 2) *parikamma bhāvanā* (preparatory/preliminary stage of meditation), the recitation of the Pāli words ‘*sammā arahaṃ*’. Although he mentions the observing of the breath passing the seventh position and recollecting the Buddha with regard to *sammā arahaṃ* (for example, *Compilation of Dhamma sermons* 2012: 69 and 879), Luang Pho Sot does not explicitly equate Sammā Arahaṃ with any of the 40 objects of meditation in the Visuddhimagga. However, Achan Sermchai, in order to link Sammā Arahaṃ meditation to the Visuddhimagga further, views the basic level of Sammā Arahaṃ meditation as consisting of five of these objects, namely the recollection

of the Buddha (*buddhānussati*), recollection of the Dhamma (*dhammānussati*), recollection of the *saṅgha* (*saṅghānussati*), mindfulness of breath (*ānāpānasati*) and the light (*āloka kasiṇa*). He explains that the word ‘*sammā*’, short for *sammāsambuddho*, meaning ‘one who is self-enlightened’, refers to the Buddha’s wisdom (*paññāguṇa*), and the word ‘*araham*’, meaning ‘one who is far from defilements’, refers to his purity (*visuddhiguṇa*) (Sermchai 1999: 149). When one recollects these words, one’s mind becomes endowed with merits and wholesome *dhammas*; this is the recollection of the Dhamma (Sermchai 1999: 149). When one’s mind is endowed with wholesome *dhammas*, one becomes the practitioner and guardian of the Buddha’s teachings; this is the recollection of *saṅgha* (Sermchai 1999: 149).

Bowers (1996: 12) and Newell (2008: 223), in their descriptions of *Sammā Araham* meditation, mention *buddhānussati*, *ānāpānasati* and *āloka kasiṇa* practices, relying on Achan Sermchai’s summary in *The heart of Dhammakaya meditation* (Sermchai 1991: 62). However, they do not acknowledge that this equation of *Sammā Araham* meditation with the three objects is Achan Sermchai’s interpretation of Luang Pho Sot’s teachings, and assume that it is a common aspect among all *Sammā Araham* temples.

With regard to the light *kasiṇa*, Achan Sermchai equates this visual object with the visualization of the crystal sphere. He argues that it is presented in the *Visuddhimagga* as a valid and efficient way to attain *jhānas* and supernatural powers (*abhiññā*), which lead to the eight-fold transcendental knowledges (*viññā*) (Sermchai 2010: 7). He quotes a passage from the Upakkilesa Sutta in the Majjhima Nikāya (M II 152) in which the Buddha urged

Anuruddha and others to practise meditation in order to obtain *nimittas* as he did when he perceived light and a vision of forms when he was a *bodhisatta*. This reference is not mentioned in Luang Pho Sot's teachings:

Anuruddha and company, you must penetrate those *nimittas* that I saw before enlightenment when I, the Tathāgata, was just a *bodhisatta*, not yet enlightened with higher wisdom. I too perceived both light and a vision of forms. (Sermchai 2010: 8)²⁵²

Achan Sermchai argues that *nimittas* or mental images are practised and taught by the Buddha in the *samatha* stage in order to rid one's mind of hindrances and to achieve *jhānas*. They are also used in the *vipassanā* stage when the practitioner examines the *nimittas* of conditioned *dhammas*, e.g. the five aggregates, as impermanent, suffering and not-self in order to gain *bhavanāmayapaññā* (wisdom arising from meditation) (Sermchai 1999: 241). To support this claim, Sermchai cites a passage from the Saṅgaṇikārāma Sutta (A III 422–23). This reference is not mentioned either in Luang Pho Sot's teachings:

Without taking pleasure in being alone in seclusion, it is impossible to obtain the *nimittas* [of *samādhi citta* and *vipassanā*] *citta*. Without obtaining the

²⁵² ดูก่อนอนุรุธกับคณะ พวกเธอต้องเพ่งตลอดนิมิตนั้นแล แม้เราก็คเคยมาแล้ว เมื่อก่อนตรัสรู้ ยังไม่รู้เองด้วยปัญญาอันยิ่ง ยังเป็นพระโพธิสัตว์อยู่ ย่อมจำแสงสว่าง และเห็นรูปนิมิตได้เหมือนกัน

(M III 157: *taṃ kho pana vo Anuruddhā nimittaṃ paṭivijjhitabbam. ahaṃ pi sudam Anuruddhā pubbe va sambodhā anabhisambuddho bodhisatto va samāno obhāsañ c' eva sañjānāmi dassanañ ca rūpānaṃ*). Unless otherwise indicated, I am translating into English the Thai translation of the Pāli. I also provide the Pāli of the PTS edition for reference purposes.

nimittas [of *samādhi citta* and *vipassanā*] *citta*, it is impossible to fulfil the right view of *vipassanā*. (Sermchai 1999: 238)²⁵³

It should be noted that the above translation by Achan Sermchai incorporates the meaning of the commentary (Mp III 410), which I have put in brackets.²⁵⁴

With regard to *ānāpānasati*, Achan Sermchai (1999: 150–2; 2010: 10–12) links this practice in *Sammā Arahaṃ* meditation to the mindfulness of breath section in the *Visuddhimagga* (Vism 280–1), where the breath is said to be divided into the beginning, the middle and the end, with the end of the inbreaths and the beginning of the outbreaths being at the navel. The *Visuddhimagga* (Vism 281–2) states that the meditator should contemplate the breath at one fixed point and should not follow it in and out as that would cause the body and mind to become agitated and confused. These references are not mentioned in Luang Pho Sot’s teachings. According to Achan Sermchai (1999: 150–1), the *Visuddhimagga*, in referring to the beginning, middle and end of the breath, is talking about the three bodily bases. The navel is the same as the sixth position in *Sammā Arahaṃ* meditation, and placing one’s attention there while observing the breaths passing in and out is the same as in *Sammā Arahaṃ* meditation. The only difference is that in *Sammā*

²⁵³ A III 422–23: *eko paviveke anabhiramanto cittassa nimittaṃ gahessatī ti n’ etaṃ ṭhānaṃ vijjati. cittassa nimittaṃ agaṇhanto sammādiṭṭhiṃ paripūressatī ti n’ etaṃ ṭhānaṃ vijjati.*

²⁵⁴ Mp III 410: *cittassa nimittan ti samādhivipassanācittassa nimittaṃ samādhivipassanākāraṃ – ‘nimitta of citta’ means ‘nimitta of samādhi-citta and vipassanā-citta’, ‘the mode of samādhi and vipassanā’. sammādiṭṭhin ti vipassanāsammādiṭṭhiṃ – ‘right view’ means ‘right view that is vipassanā’.* I would like to thank Rupert Gethin for his help with the translation of these passages.

Arahaṃ meditation, one is to observe the breath going in and out at two finger widths above the navel, the seventh position (Sermchai 1999: 150).

The seeing of the *dhamma* sphere is also given a canonical reference. Achan Sermchai cites the Dhammapada, Khuddaka Nikāya (Dhp 33–34): ‘The wise man should restrain the mind, which is very hard to see, refined and likes to dwell on attractive sensual objects. A well-trained mind brings happiness’ (Sermchai 2010: 29). Seeing here is interpreted literally in the same way as Luang Pho Sot’s seeing of ‘bodies in bodies, feelings in feelings, minds in minds, and *dhmmas* in *dhmmas*’ in the Mahāsatipatṭhāna Sutta (D II 290).

In the section titled ‘Multiple bodies’, Achan Sermchai (2010: 18–21) cites two passages from ‘Sermon on three bodies’ by Phra Phrom Muni (Phin Suvaco) (1984: 1–3 and 21–23), the late abbot of Wat Bowonniwet Vihāra, Bangkok.²⁵⁵ The passages are extracts from a sermon given at the Buddhist Union of Thailand on 10 October 1955, which was published as a book by Mahamakut Buddhist University in 1984. Phra Phrom Muni (1894–1961) was the fifth abbot of Wat Bowonniwet, which has been the centre of Thammayuttika *nikāya* since Prince Mongkut (later King Rama IV), its first abbot, initiated a reform by introducing a new monastic lineage to the Thai *saṅgha*. Prince-Patriarch Wachirayan, who was the third abbot at the temple, continued this reform, centralizing the *saṅgha* administration, modernizing and standardizing monastic education nationwide. Phra Phrom Muni entered Wat Bowonniwet in 1918 under Wachirayan’s abbotship and

²⁵⁵พระพรหมมุนี (ผิน สุวโจ) biographical information taken from Wat Bowonniwet (2014).

succeeded Supreme Patriarch Wachirayanawong²⁵⁶ as the abbot in 1958, a position he held for four years. Supreme Patriarch Wachirayanawong, the fourth abbot of the temple, took an interest in Sammā Arahaṃ meditation and asked Luang Pho Sot to provide him with a summary of his method, which resulted in the publication of the *Abbot's handbook* in 1949, dedicated to him.²⁵⁷ Phra Phrom Muni's connection with Luang Pho Sot is unknown, but I speculate that because of his predecessor's interest in Sammā Arahaṃ meditation, Phra Phrom Muni may have also taken an interest in it as well. He may have discussed and exchanged ideas with Sammā Arahaṃ teachers and practitioners. The first practitioner that comes to mind is Achan Voramai Kabilsingh who studied meditation under both Luang Pho Sot and Phra Phrom Muni. It is not uncommon to see high-ranking Thammayut monks who were at the forefront of the monastic reform also taking an interest in studying and preserving traditional meditation texts and Sammā Arahaṃ meditation, as in the case of Phra Upāli Khunupamachan (Chan Siricando), the late abbot of Wat Baromniwat, who ordered the compilation of the Chai Yasothonrat anthology. The anthology's reprint in 2015 was also published by the Thammayut *nikāya* on the occasion of the cremation of the Supreme Patriarch Somdet Phra Yansangwon of Wat Bowonniwet. According to his biography, Phra Phrom Muni was also active in promoting Buddhist educational reform in Thailand as a committee member in charge of the national Pāli and Naktham examinations and later as the president of the Educational Council of Mahamakut Buddhist University. He also taught King Rama IX when he was ordained at Wat Bowonniwet in 1956.

²⁵⁶ สมเด็จพระสังฆราชเจ้า กรมหลวงวชิรญาณวงศ์.

²⁵⁷ คู่มือสมาธิ.

In this sermon, Phra Phrom Muni explains that there are various interpretations of the contemplation of body in body according to the Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta. From the ‘scholar’s perspective’, this refers to the contemplation of each component of the human body in separate pieces. However, from the perspective of a ‘Naktham’, which Achan Sermchai (2010: 18–19) interprets to mean ‘practitioner’, body in body refers to: 1) in an ‘outward direction’, ‘the contemplation of the *dhammakāya* in the *deva* body and the *deva* body in the human body’; and 2) in an ‘inward direction’, ‘the contemplation of the human body as outermost with the *deva* body in the middle and the *dhammakāya* inside’. According to Phra Phrom Muni, both perspectives are correct, the first one according to the correct translation of Pāli texts, and the second according to ‘their knowledge of origins of human and *deva* bodies’ (Sermchai 2010: 19). This understanding of *satipaṭṭhānas* is in accordance with Luang Pho Sot’s understanding that the practices described in the *sutta* are seen as examples and guidelines and their scope can be widened according to the practitioner’s level of attainment.

He goes on to state that both human and *deva* bodies are mentioned in the Mahāsamaya Sutta (D II 253). This reference is not mentioned in Luang Pho Sot’s teachings: ‘Those who take Lord Buddha as refuge will not go to *apāyabhūmi* [the suffering worlds]. When they leave their human bodies, they will fully attain *deva* bodies’ (Sermchai 2010: 20).²⁵⁸

²⁵⁸ บุคคลเหล่าใดเหล่านั้น ถึงพระพุทธเจ้าว่าเป็นสรณะ บุคคลเหล่านั้น จักไม่ไปสู่อายภูมิ ละกายที่เป็นของมนุษย์แล้ว จักยังเทวกายให้เต็มรอบ

(D II 255: *ye keci buddhaṃ saraṇaṃ gatā se na te gamissanti apāyabhūmiṃ pahāya mānusaṃ dehaṃ devakāyaṃ paripūressanti*).

Phra Phrom Muni and Achan Sermchai see this passage as the Buddha's confirmation of the existence of *deva* bodies within human bodies.

The second reference from the Aggañña Sutta (D III 80), according to Achan Sermchai (2010: 20), confirms the existence of inner *brahmā* bodies and *dhammakāya*: 'The words *dhammakāyo*, *brahmakāyo*, *dhammabhūto* and *brahmabhūto* are all names for the Tathāgata.' This reference is also given by Luang Pho Sot in support of his understanding of *dhammakāya*.

Phra Phrom Muni interprets the above passage, 'When one leaves the human body, one will fully attain a *deva* body', to imply that there are several levels of *deva* bodies – low, medium and high levels – as the words 'fully attain' mean attain flawlessly, which indicates that there are those who have not attained perfect *deva* bodies, such as hell guardians (*nirayapāla*) (Sermchai 2010: 20). Thus, in this *sutta*, according to Phra Phrom Muni, the Buddha is referring to different classes of *devas*. Just like in Sammā Arahaṃ meditation, there are also different classes of higher bodies: crude *deva*, refined *deva*, crude *brahmā*, refined *brahmā* bodies etc. *Dhammakāya*, according to Phra Phrom Muni, is the supra-mudane (*lokuttara*), unconditioned (*asaṅkhata*) and immortal (*amata*) Dhamma; the word *dhamma* here means 'that which endures' (Sermchai 2010: 21).

Achan Sermchai (2010: 25) explains that by stopping still at the centre of the sphere one achieves the purification of morality (*sīlavisuddhi*) as the intentions of the body, speech and mind become pure. Stopping still at the centre of the sphere and seeing the inner

spheres allows the mind to be freed from the five hindrances and the *jhāna* factors to be developed, and as a result the meditator achieves purification of mind (*cittavisuddhi*). When he/she reaches the inner mundane bodies, Achan Sermchai (2010: 35) explains that at this stage the meditator begins to understand that all conditioned phenomena, especially living beings with consciousness (*upādinnaśaṅkhāra*), are endowed with the three characteristics: impermanent, suffering and not-self. This leads to purification of view (*diṭṭhivisuddhi*) (Sermchai 2010: 35). As the meditator attains more and more refined *dhammakāyas*, he/she can examine the conditioned phenomena more widely and deeply, which leads to the attainments of purification of overcoming doubts (*kaṅkhāvitaraṇavisuddhi*), knowledge and vision of the path and not-path (*maggāmaggañāṇadassanavisuddhi*), knowledge and vision of the practice (*paṭipadāñāṇadassanavisuddhi*) and knowledge and vision (*ñāṇadassanavisuddhi*), thereby linking the different stages of Sammā Arahaṇa meditation with the seven stages of purifications in the Visuddhimagga.

4.2 Four-tier *satipaṭṭhāna* practice in Sammā Arahaṇa meditation

Following the translation of the words ‘*ekāyanamagga*’ by Luang Pho Sot and his teacher, Phra Ratchaphromathen, Achan Sermchai views the practice of *satipaṭṭhānas* as the ‘only path’ to *nibbāna* (see Sermchai 2013: 19). This view has become more and more widespread among meditation teachers and practitioners in Thailand following the introduction and popularization of the Rise and Fall tradition during the second half of the last century. This view, coupled with criticisms of Sammā Arahaṇa meditation, is the reason

why all of his sermons and books on meditation focus on arguing that Sammā Arahaṃ is in accordance with *satipaṭṭhānas* in the Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta.

In my interview with Achan Sermchai (2015), I asked him to clarify his understanding of *satipaṭṭhānas* as the ‘only path’. He explained that *satipaṭṭhānas* have to be interpreted to encompass all the teachings of the Buddha: for example, the practice of morality (*sīla*) and the 40 objects of *samatha* meditation, such as the light *kaṣiṇa* and the recollection of the Buddha (*buddhānussati*), which are part of the basic level of Sammā Arahaṃ meditation, are to be considered the foundation of the practice of *satipaṭṭhānas*. Likewise, each of the factors of the Eightfold Noble Path is to be considered as the foundation of the factor of right mindfulness. This explanation is similar to the ones given by Sawet Piamphongsan, the author of *Buddhaviṇṇaṇā*, and Achan Naeb Mahaniranonda, the renowned *vipassanā* teacher, who, in explaining *satipaṭṭhānas* as the ‘only path’, subsume the most important teachings of the Buddha into the practice of the Four Foundations of Mindfulness.²⁵⁹

From the accounts of the Pāli *suttas* and Luang Pho Sot’s explanation of *satipaṭṭhānas*, Achan Sermchai came to understand that there is a process in the practice of *satipaṭṭhānas*. As a result, he incorporated the practice of the Four Foundations of Mindfulness at every level of Sammā Arahaṃ meditation from the preliminary to the highest level. In my analysis of *Samatha vipassanā meditation*, I discerned a four-tier system in which the meditator is able to practise *satipaṭṭhāna* at different stages of Sammā Arahaṃ meditation

²⁵⁹ See, Sawet (1960: 83–4) and Naeb (2010: 171).

from the very beginning to the most advanced stages, thereby incorporating the various interpretations of the Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta into Sammā Arahaṃ meditation.

Achan Sermchai (2010: 47–49) explains that even at the level of the bodily bases (level one), when one has not seen the *dhamma* sphere, and not even reached access concentration (*upacāra samādhi*), one can also practise mindfulness of body in body by contemplating the repulsiveness of the different parts of the body and their three characteristics.

One envisages hair from one's own scalp at the centre of the sphere [*nimitta*] at the centre of the body. One continues contemplating the hair until the mind is calmed and close to achieving access concentration [*upacāra samādhi*]. Then one will see its repulsiveness. For example, the hair is stained with scalp tissues, sweat and grease from the scalp. When it is in contact with various objects, dust and other particles pile up and the hair becomes very dirty, producing unpleasant odours. After one contemplates continuously for some time, the *nimitta* of the hair will naturally change from black to grey. This is the seeing of the characteristic of impermanence (*aniccam*). After continuing to contemplate, one will see the vision of hair falling. This is the seeing of its transitory nature as suffering (*dukkham*). After continuing to contemplate, one will see the vision of the hair breaking up. This is the realization that there is nothing (in our body) that has a

permanent essence, lasting happiness and no eternal self or *anattā* characteristic. (Sermchai 2010: 47–48)²⁶⁰

Achan Sermchai instructs the meditator to contemplate other parts of the body in the same way. This practice is derived from an interpretation of the mindfulness of the body in the Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta and is also found in the Kāyagatāsati Sutta (M III 88). Thus, by incorporating these practices into level one of Sammā Arahaṃ meditation when the concentration level is minimal, Achan Sermchai reinterpreted the basic level of Sammā Arahaṃ meditation, bringing it closer to Burmese *vipassanā* methods. As I mentioned above, Burmese *vipassanā*, such as the Rise and Fall method, can be categorized as ‘bare insight’, as it employs only the *vipassanā* method and utilizes the most basic level of concentration (*khaṇika samādhi*). Achan Sermchai brings in *satipaṭṭhāna* practices prior to the meditator reaching access concentration and thus incorporates ‘bare insight’ training into Sammā Arahaṃ meditation.

At the level of the *dhamma* sphere (level two), in which the mind has achieved the first *jhāna*, rather than imagining the different parts of the body, the meditator is able to see them vividly with the divine eye and is even able to smell their odours. At the level of *dhammakāya* (level three), the meditator is able to see the different parts of the body and smell them even more clearly and distinctly, and is able to contemplate the nature of all the

²⁶⁰ ให้กำหนดเห็นผมที่อยู่บนหนังศีรษะของเราตรงศูนย์กลางดวงศูนย์กลางกายนั้น เพื่อดูจนใจสงบตั้งมั่น ประมาณใกล้อุปลารสมาธิ ก็จะเห็นว่าผมเป็นธรรมชาติที่ไม่สะอาด กล่าวคือยอมแปดเปื้อนด้วยเหงื่อไคล ไขมัน เมื่อฝุ่นละอองจับ และหมักหมมไว้นานก็จะสกปรก มีกลิ่นเหม็น เมื่อเพ่งดูนานไปก็จะเห็นนิมิตของผมนั้น เปลี่ยนแปลงไปเป็นพองก ตามธรรมชาติ นี่แสดงอนิจจลักษณะ ว่าเป็นของไม่เที่ยง เพ่งดูต่อไปจะเห็นนิมิตของผมนี้ หลุดร่วง ว่าเป็นของทนอยู่ในสภาพเดิมไม่ได้นาน เป็นทุกขัง เพ่งดูต่อไปจะเห็นนิมิตของผมนี้แตก สลายหมดสภาพเดิมของมันไป ไม่มีอะไร [ในตัวเรา] มีแก่นสารสาระในความเป็นของเที่ยง ในความเป็นสุขที่ถาวร และในความเป็นตัวตนของใครตลอดไป นี่แสดงอนัตตลักษณะ.

inner mundane bodies as well. The meditator who has reached the most refined *dhammakāya* (level four) is able to see into the future to contemplate the *nimittas* (mental images) of him/herself in the future. The realization of the three characteristics is deeper and stronger than contemplation at the most basic level.

One makes a resolve to see one's body in the future; each year, every five years or every 10 years into the future [...] One continues to observe oneself until further into the future until one reaches the day that one dies. One will see the *nimitta* of oneself in the future as impermanent and suffering until the day one dies, and as not-self. (Sermchai 2010: 50)²⁶¹

This four-tier system also applies to the contemplation of feelings, minds and *dhammas* as well: for example, the meditator who has not seen the *dhamma* sphere can contemplate feelings of happiness in stopping still at the centre of the body, and as he/she progresses can contemplate the more refined happiness and different types of joys that accompany the different bodies and *jhānas* to the very highest level. With regard to mindfulness of mind in mind, at the basic level, one contemplates lust, hatred and delusion within the mind, and as one progresses, one is able to see that these hindrances exist in one's consciousness as different colours: lust appears as dark pink, hatred appears as dark red or dull green and delusion appears as grey-white, all tainting and dulling the bright sphere. When one reaches

²⁶¹ ให้อธิษฐานสืบไปดูอรรถภาพของตนเองในอนาคต แต่ละปีๆ หรือ แต่ละช่วง ๕ ปี หรือ ๑๐ ปี ต่อไปในอนาคต [...] อธิษฐานดูอรรถภาพของตนสืบไปในอนาคตต่อไป แต่ละช่วงๆ ต่อไปจนวันตาย ก็จะได้เห็นว่าเป็นสภาพไม่เที่ยง เป็นทุกข์ จนถึงวันตาย เป็นสภาพที่มีโชตน.

the inner bodies and *dhammakāya*, one's mind becomes purer and purer and one is able to see these defilements as colours fading away from the mind.

With regard to the mindfulness of '*dhamma in dhamma*', the meditator is advised to start by contemplating the five aggregates, first of the human body and mind, and later of the inner mundane bodies and minds, as impermanent, suffering and not-self. When one reaches the highest level, one is able to see the entire cosmos and contemplate all the beings of the different realms, from the lowest hell to the highest formless realm, encompassing the five aggregates of the whole universe. A long subsection under the contemplation of *dhamma in dhamma* (Sermchai 2010: 83–137) provides guidance on this practice and is devoted to detailed descriptions of all the realms and beings in the Buddhist cosmos. Thus, as one progresses up the different levels of *Sammā Arahaṃ* meditation, the scope of the words 'bodies', 'feelings', 'minds' and '*dhammas*' widens from one's own human body feelings, mind and *dhammas* to those of all beings in the entire cosmos. Achan Sermchai argues that contemplation of the entire cosmos is not something new but can be found in the teachings of Luang Pho Sot as part of the higher levels of *Sammā Arahaṃ* meditation. Luang Pho Sot's method of contemplating the different realms can be found in the *Abbot's handbook* (63 sermons 1984: (309) – (11)). However, Luang Pho Sot does not explicitly link this practice to the contemplation of *dhamma in dhamma*.

In both of their understandings of the *Mahāsatipatṭhāna Sutta*, the practices described in the *sutta* are seen as examples and guidelines and their scope can be widened according to the practitioner's level of attainment. Luang Pho Sot widens its scope to include the inner

bodies, feelings, *cittas* and *dhammas*, and here Achan Sermchai widens the scope to include the body of the practitioner in the future and the entire three-realm universe. The widening of the scope of *satipaṭṭhānas* also exists in Achan Voramai's teachings. As mentioned above, Achan Voramai also understood the practice of *satipaṭṭhānas*, similarly to Luang Pho Sot, as referring to the inner bodies and minds as well as the human body and mind (Voramai 2003: 280). However, she extends the scope of her *satipaṭṭhāna* practice, not into the future, but into the past, to include the bodies and minds of her previous lives (Voramai 2003: 280).

As part of the Sammā Arahaṇ's explanations of the seven bodily bases and the rebirth process, Achan Sermchai introduces two Pāli terms, namely *paṭisandhicitta* (rebirth-linking consciousness) and *kalalarūpa* (first stage of the foetus). *Paṭisandhicitta* and *kalalarūpa* are two terms associated with the process of rebirth. The former is primarily a commentarial term, but is also found in the Paṭisambhidāmagga and refers to the first moment of consciousness in a new life. The latter is found in the Indaka Sutta (SN I 206) and refers to the physical embryo at conception (first seven days).²⁶² Achan Sermchai (2010: 17) cites a passage from the Samantapāsādikā (Sp II 437) defining *paṭisandhicitta* as the first *citta* or consciousness that arises at the moment of rebirth in the mother's womb. This consciousness arises together with the non-material aggregates (*arūpakhandha*, namely *vedanā*, *saññā* and *saṅkhāra*) and the *kalalarūpa*. The *kalalarūpa* is described in this text as appearing like a drop of clear sesame seed oil, whose size is equal to a drop attached to a single thread of lamb wool. Achan Sermchai (2010: 17) then links these two

²⁶² Rupert Gethin, September 11, 2017, e-mail message to the author.

terms to Luang Pho Sot's explanation of the rebirth process. He explains that when a being is about to undergo rebirth as a human being, that is, its *paṭisandhicitta* is about to arise in the mother's womb, the *citta* of that being passes through each of the seven bodily bases of the father and settles at his seventh position before exiting the father's body, reversing the same path. It then enters the mother's body through seven bases and settles in the mother's womb where the *kalalarūpa*, or the first stage of the foetus, is formed. If the being is to be born female, it always enters and exits the parents through their left nostrils, and if it is to be born male, it always enters and exits through their right nostrils (Sermchai 2010: 17). The stages of embryonic development associated with the bodily bases are, as mentioned in Chapter two, among the common features of the so-called *borān kammaṭṭhāna* tradition. However, Achan Sermchai provides a new take on this process by later connecting it to the contemplation of the teaching of Dependent Origination (*paṭiccasamuppāda*).

Under the section of mindfulness of *dhammas* (*dhammānupassanā satipaṭṭhāna*), Achan Sermchai (2010: 155) incorporates Sammā Arahaṃ's rebirth and cognitive processes in his elaboration of Dependent Origination. First he cites the 12 links: ignorance (*avijjā*) is a condition for formation (*sankhāra*); formation is a condition for consciousness (*viññāṇa*); consciousness is a condition for name and form (*nāmarūpa*); name and form are a condition for sixfold sense bases (*saḷāyatana*); sixfold sense bases are a condition for contact (*phassa*); contact is a condition for feeling (*vedanā*); feeling is a condition for craving (*taṇhā*); craving is a condition for clinging (*upadāna*); clinging is a condition for becoming (*bhava*); becoming is a condition for birth (*jāti*); birth is a condition for aging and death

(*jarāmaraṇa*). Then he explains that due to past ignorance, craving, clinging, *paṭisandhiviññāṇa* of a being arises in its mother's womb together with the three mental aggregates and *kalalarūpa* (Sermchai 2010: 156). The refined versions of the form aggregate (*rūpakhandha*) exists at the seventh position of every individual as a clear sphere, and within it there are the spheres of the four elements (earth, water, wind and fire) at each corner, with the air element (*ākāśadhātu*) in the middle (as shown in the diagram in Chapter two). The elements control the body. The refined versions of the four mental aggregates also exist as spheres, namely *vedanā* as 'the sphere of seeing/sensing' (ดวงเห็น), which experiences feelings; *saññā* as 'the sphere of remembering' (ดวงจำ), which remembers different objects; *saṅkhāra* as 'the sphere of thinking' (ดวงคิด), the mental construction, which directs the mind to a particular object; and *viññāṇa* as 'the sphere of knowing' (ดวงรู้), which is the awareness of an object (Sermchai 2010: 156–7). The mind of the individual thus consists of these four spheres that function together in the cognitive process.

When an object comes into contact with a sense base, the four spheres will react to it, functioning together like a spider web, and conditioning the mind. The mind then vanishes at the sixth bodily base (navel) and the new five aggregates, i.e. the mind with the new inner body, will appear at the seventh base (two finger widths above the navel). This new mind and inner body's *bhava* (or realm of existence) changes every moment depending on the nature of the mind, i.e. whether it is wholesome or unwholesome. The new inner body (whether human, *deva*, *brahmā*, etc.) arises simultaneously with the new mind in accordance with the teaching of Dependent Origination that name and form (*nāmarūpa*)

always arise together (Sermchai 2010: 157). The nature of the minds of individuals throughout their whole lives causes them to perform good and bad deeds, which will lead them to happy or suffering rebirths in the three realms after they die. Thus, Achan Sermchai incorporates Luang Pho Sot's teachings of these processes into his understanding of Dependent Origination. He explains the process both over three lives and also in a single moment.

Achan Sermchai (2017) also relies on this understanding of Dependent Origination to explain why in Sammā Arahaṃ meditation, formless *brahmā* bodies are seen as having forms. In my interview with him, he explains as consciousness is a condition for the arising of name and form (*nāmarūpa*), the form aggregate (*rūpakhandha*) must arise together with the four mental aggregates (*nāmakhandha*) (Sermchai 2017). The formless *brahmās* in formless realms do have forms, but their forms are so refined that their own eyes (*cakkhu*) and the eyes of beings in the lower realms cannot see them (Sermchai 2017). Only those who have reached *dhammakāya*, which possesses even more refined eyes, can see the formless *brahmās'* forms (Sermchai 2017).

4.3 Elaboration on Sammā Arahaṃ meditation's development of *vipassanā*

As I mention above, according to Luang Pho Sot, the development of insight is not only achieved through seeing the three characteristics (impermanent, suffering and not-self) of the conditioned *dhammas* alone but also through a comparison between the characteristics of the conditioned *dhammas* and the unconditioned *dhamma*. The meditator develops

vipassanā first by being mindful of the lower mundane bodies, feelings, *cittas* and *dhammas* and seeing their three characteristics. When one reaches the *dhammakāya*, Luang Pho Sot advises that one should contemplate the three characteristics of the five aggregates of all of the mundane bodies in comparison with the opposite characteristics of the unconditioned *dhammakāya*. The three characteristics of impermanence, suffering and not-self are taught not just to enable one to let go of and abandon the conditioned *dhammas* but also to point subtly to permanence, happiness and self of the ultimate *dhammakāya*, which is the true refuge (*Compilation of Dhamma sermons* 2012: 26–27).

Achan Sermchai seeks to elaborate on, and provide further scriptural support for, this understanding. He explains, similarly to Luang Pho Sot, that the development of *vipassanā* can be divided into two categories: examining the conditioned *dhammas* and the unconditioned *nibbāna*. At the level of *anupassanā* (contemplation), the practitioner begins by seeing the three characteristics of the conditioned *dhammas* (Sermchai 2009: 311). He/she starts with the five aggregates and eventually moves on to contemplate all *dhammas* in the three realms (*bhūmīs*). This is shown in Achan Sermchai's detailed description of the three-realm cosmos. When the practitioner reaches the level of *lokuttara vipassanā* (supra-mundane insight), he/she extends the scope of contemplation to include not only the conditioned *dhammas* but also: 1) The Four Noble Truths; and 2) *visaṇhkkāradhamma* or *nibbāna* (Sermchai 2009: 313–4).

With regard to the contemplation of the unconditioned, Achan Sermchai (2009: 328–9) emphasizes that this should be done in comparison with the conditioned (*saṅkhata*)

dharmas. When the practitioner has thoroughly examined all the conditioned *dharmas* according to the three characteristics, he/she then develops a supra-mundane wisdom that is able to penetrate the unconditioned *nibbāna*. At this point, the moment of entering the fruit of the Buddhist path called ‘certainty of rightness’ (*sammattaniyāma*),²⁶³ the conditioned or worldly (*lokiya*) *dharmas* and the unconditioned (*asaṅkhata*) or supra-mundane (*lokuttara*) *dhamma* i.e. *nibbāna* can be compared as follows: on the conditioned side, impermanence, suffering and not-self are found together with the three characteristics; on the unconditioned side, permanence, happiness and having the substance and essence in being self are found (Sermchai 2009: 328–9).

To support this claim, he cites a lengthy passage from the Paṭisambhidāmagga, not mentioned in Luang Pho Sot’s teachings. The passage lists 40 conditions of conditioned *dharmas* against the opposite 40 conditions of the unconditioned *nibbāna* as follows:

A monk gains *anulomakhanti* [realization of the three marks of existence] by how many conditions? Enters *sammattaniyāma* by how many conditions? A monk gains *anulomakhanti* by 40 conditions. Enters *sammattaniyāma* by 40 conditions?

How does a monk gain *anulomakhanti* by forty conditions? How does he enter *sammattaniyāma* by forty conditions?

²⁶³ Ñāṇamoli (1982: 401-2) translates this term as ‘the certainty of rightness’ and it is used in the Paṭisambhidāmagga to refer to a stage in the development of insight knowledge when the attainment of the path and fruit is certain.

The monk examines the five aggregates by their nature of impermanence, suffering, becoming ill, being like a boil, being like an arrow, hardship, becoming sick, being the other, being that which is decayed, bringing the bad, being evil, being dangerous, being an obstacle, being afraid, being that which is rotten, being not lasting, being without resistance, being without protection, being without refuge, being empty, being bare, being void, being *anattā*, being harmful, having change as norm, being without an essence, the root of hardship, being like an executioner, being a decay, having *āśava*, being conditioned, being a victim of *māra*, having birth as a norm, having aging as a norm, having sickness as a norm, having death as a norm, having grief as a norm, having lamentation as a norm, having despair as a norm, having sorrow as a norm.

When examining the five aggregates by their nature of impermanence, he gains *anulomakhanti*. When examining the extinguishing of the five aggregates to be *nibbāna*, as permanent, he enters *sammattaniyāma*.

When examining the five aggregates by their nature of having sorrow as a norm, he gains *anulomakhanti*. When examining the extinguishing of the five aggregates, to be *nibbāna*, as without sorrow, he enters *sammattaniyāma*.²⁶⁴

²⁶⁴ Paṭiś II 238–241: *katihākārehi anulomikaṃ khantiṃ paṭilabhati katihākārehi sammattaniyāmaṃ okkamati. cattārīsāya ākārehi anulomikaṃ khantiṃ paṭilabhati cattārīsāya ākārehi sammattaniyāmaṃ okkamati. katamehi cattārīsāya ākārehi anulomikaṃ khantiṃ paṭilabhati katamehi cattārīsāya ākārehi*

The text compares each of the 40 characteristics of conditioned *dhammas* with each of the 40 characteristics of the *nibbāna*, for example: without a resistance/a resistance; without protection/a protection; without an essence/has an essence; becoming sick/not becoming sick; not a refuge/a refuge; bare/not bare etc. The word *attā* is not present in the description of *nibbāna* in the Paṭisambhidāmagga, and where *anattā* is mentioned, *nibbāna* is given the characteristic of *paramattha*, which Achan Sermchai translates as ‘supremely beneficial’. According to Achan Sermchai, *attā* is implied within the text by the use of its synonyms such as *saraṇa*, ‘being a refuge’, and *sāra*, ‘having an essence’, etc.²⁶⁵

As part of the mindfulness of *dhamma* in *dhamma*, Achan Sermchai not only provides the Sammā Arahaṃ’s practice of contemplating the Four Noble Truths but also the method of their examination as found in the Paṭisambhidāmagga, not mentioned before in Luang Pho Sot’s teachings. The Sammā Arahaṃ’s practice consists in seeing the ‘suffering sphere’ within the *dhamma* sphere of the human body, which appears dark, almost completely black (Sermchai 2010: 183). Inside the suffering sphere, there are ‘birth sphere’, ‘aging sphere’ and ‘pain sphere’. These spheres change throughout our lives and the practitioner must observe their impermanence, suffering and not-self. For example, the size of the aging

sammattaniyāmaṃ okkamati. pañcakkhandhe aniccato dukkhato rogato gaṇḍato sallato aghato ābādhato parato palokato itito upaddavato bhayato upasaggato calato pabhaṅgato addhuvato attāṇato aleṇato asaraṇato rittato tucchato suñṇato anattato ādīnavato vipariṇāmadhammato asārakato aghamūlato vadhakato vibhavato sāsavato saṅkhatato mārāmisato jātīdhammato jarādhammato byādhidhammato maraṇadhammato sokadhammato paridevadhammato upāyāsadhammato saṅkilesikadhammato pañcakkhandhe aniccato passanto anulomikaṃ khantiṃ paṭīlabhati pañcannaṃ khandhānaṃ nirodho niccaṃ nibbānanti passanto sammattaniyāmaṃ okkamati [...] pañcakkhandhe saṅkilesikadhammato passanto anulomikaṃ khantiṃ paṭīlabhati pañcannaṃ khandhānaṃ nirodho asaṅkiliṭṭhaṃ nibbānaṃ ti passanto sammattaniyāmaṃ okkamati.

²⁶⁵ For a discussion of this reference in the context of Achan Sermchai’s argument that *nibbāna* is self, see Potprecha (2009: 69–70).

sphere gradually increases as one grows older; when one becomes ill, the pain sphere turns darker (Sermchai 2010: 183). When someone is about to die, his/her 'death sphere' will arise, appearing completely black. At death, this sphere causes the *deva* body to become detached from the human body, initiating the rebirth process (Sermchai 2010: 183). With regard to the '*samudaya* (cause of suffering) sphere', it appears dark and consists of '*kāmatanḥā*' (sensual desire), '*bhavatanḥā*' (craving for existence) and '*vibhavatanḥā*' (craving for non-existence) spheres inside it (Sermchai 2010: 186). These three spheres condition one's mind to think, speak and act in unwholesome ways, causing bad *kamma*. For noble persons (*ariyapuggala*) and those who practise the Dhamma, one will see their '*nirodha*' (cessation of suffering) and '*magga*' (path leading to cessation) spheres within their minds, which will appear luminous (Sermchai 2010: 187).

In addition to seeing these spheres and understanding the nature of each of the four truths through their observation, Achan Sermchai also provides a method for contemplating the Four Noble Truths found in Paṭisambhidāmagga as part of *lokuttara vipassanā*, in which the practitioner examines both the characteristics of the conditioned and the unconditioned of the Four Noble Truths in comparison. This is done similarly to the contemplation method above, that the conditioned *dhammas* have the opposite characteristics to the unconditioned *nibbāna*. However, this section also provides an exception to the rule, i.e. the state of the penetration of the four truths by one single insight is to be contemplated as not-self.

Achan Sermchai argues that in examining the four truths, the practitioner must distinguish between the penetration of the entire four truths by one *ñāṇa* and the penetration of each

of the Four Truths (Sermchai 2010: 220). In the Paṭisambhidāmagga, the entire four truths are explained as penetrated altogether by one single insight consisting of 12 aspects:

In how many aspects do the four truths have a single penetration? The four truths have a single penetration in 12 aspects, namely in the sense of the real, in the sense of *anattā*, in the sense of the true, in the sense of penetration, in the sense of directly knowing, in the sense of fully knowing, in the sense of *dhamma*, in the sense of the real, in the sense of what is known, in the sense of realization, in the sense of contacting and in the sense of comprehension.

In these 12 ways the four truths are included as one. What is included as one is a unity. Unity is penetrated by one knowledge. In this way the four truths have a single penetration.²⁶⁶

[In] how many aspects do the four truths have a single penetration [by one insight]? What is impermanent, that is suffering. What is impermanent and suffering, that is *anattā*. What is impermanent suffering and *anattā*, that is the real. What is impermanent, suffering, *anattā* and the real, that is the truth. What is impermanent, suffering, *anattā*, the real and the truth, that is included as one. What is included as one, that is unity. Unity is penetrated completely [the one

²⁶⁶ Paṭis II 107: *katih' ākārehi cattāri saccāni ekapaṭivedhāni? dvādasahi ākārehi cattāri saccāni ekapaṭivedhāni. tathaṭṭhena, anattaṭṭhena, saccaṭṭhena, paṭivedhaṭṭhena, abhijānanaṭṭhena, parijānanaṭṭhena, dhammaṭṭhena, tathaṭṭhena, ñātaṭṭhena, sacchikiriyāṭṭhena, phassanaṭṭhena, abhisamayaṭṭhena imehi dvādasahi ākārehi cattāri saccāni ekasaṅgahitāni. yaṃ ekasaṅgahitaṃ taṃ ekattaṃ. ekattaṃ ekena ñāṇena paṭivijjhatī ti cattāri saccāni ekapaṭivedhāni.*

truth] by one insight. In this way the four truths have a single penetration [completely by one insight].²⁶⁷

Among the above 12 aspects is not-self (*anattā*). For this aspect, the text provides 16 characteristics, four for each truth:

1. The state of suffering (*dukkhassa*) is a state of oppression (*pīḷaṇaṭṭho*), a state that is conditioned (*saṅkhataṭṭho*), a state that is troubled (*santāpaṭṭho*), a state of change (*vipariṇāmaṭṭho*);
2. The state of *samudaya* (*samudayassa*) is a state that is compiled (*āyuhanaṭṭho*), a cause (*nidānaṭṭho*), an object that assembles (*saññogaṭṭho*), a state of worry (*palibodhaṭṭho*);
3. The state of *nirodha* (*nirodhassa*) is a state of release (*nissaraṇaṭṭho*), a state of tranquillity (*vivekaṭṭho*), a state that is not conditioned (*asaṅkhataṭṭho*), eternal (*amataṭṭho*);
4. The state of *magga* (*maggassa*) is an object of escape (*niyyānaṭṭho*), a cause (*hettaṭṭho*), a vision (*dassanaṭṭho*), dominant (*ādhipateyyaṭṭho*).²⁶⁸

Achan Sermchai (2010: 229) clarifies that the above passages refer to the state of penetration of the four truths by one single insight, which is one category. The state of

²⁶⁷Paṭis II 106: *katih' ākārehi cattāri saccāni ekapaṭivedhāni. yaṃ aniccaṃ taṃ dukkhaṃ yaṃ aniccaṇca dukkhaṇ ca taṃ anattā yaṃ aniccaṇ ca dukkhaṇ ca anattā ca taṃ tathaṃ yaṃ aniccaṇ ca dukkhaṇ ca anattā ca tathaṇ ca taṃ saccam yaṃ aniccaṇ ca dukkhaṇ ca anattā ca tathaṇ ca saccāṇ ca taṃ ekasaṅgahitaṃ yaṃ ekasaṅgahitaṃ taṃ ekattaṃ ekattaṃ ekena ñāṇena paṭivijjhatī ti cattāri saccāni ekapaṭivedhāni.*

²⁶⁸ This is my summary of Achan Sermchai's (2010: 229) translation of Paṭis II 107.

penetration, i.e. the state of extinguishing of ignorance, defilements, craving and clinging, is a *kiriya* (action) state, that which arises and passes away. A *kiriya* state is to be examined as impermanent, suffering and not-self. He gives an analogy of this as an appearance of light, which destroys darkness. Only the state of illumination, which shines temporarily and extinguishes, is impermanent, suffering and not-self, but the source of light is not extinguished with the state, but has the opposite characteristics (Sermchai 2010: 229).

However, the *dhamma* states of each of the four truths are another category and different from the *dhamma* state of their penetration. Each of the four truths has its own characteristics. *Dukkhasacca*, *samudayasacca* and *maggasacca* have the characteristics of the conditioned (*saṅkhata*), which are to be contemplated as impermanent, suffering and not-self.²⁶⁹ *Nirodhasacca* has the characteristics of the unconditioned (*asaṅkhata*). *Nirodhasacca* that is unconditioned is equated with *nirodhadhātu* or *nibbānadhātu*, which is to be contemplated in comparison with the other three truths as permanent, happiness and self (Sermchai 2010: 230).

How many characteristics have the truths? The truths have two characteristics, namely *saṅkhatalakkhaṇa* and *asaṅkhatalakkhaṇa*. The truths have these two characteristics.

²⁶⁹ The Four Noble Truths consist of 1) *dukkhasacca* (the truth of suffering), 2) *samudayasacca* (the truth of the cause of suffering), 3) *nirodhasacca* (the truth of the cessation of suffering) and 4) *maggasacca* (the truth of the path leading to the end of suffering).

How many characteristics have the truths? The truths have six characteristics.

For the truths that are conditioned, arising occurs, passing away occurs, when they stand, they are subject to change. For the truth that is unconditioned, arising does not occur, passing away does not occur, when it stands, it is not subject to change. The truths have these six characteristics.

How many characteristics have the truths? The truths have 12 characteristics.

For *dukkhasacca*, arising occurs, passing away occurs, when it stands, it is subject to change.

For *samudayasacca*, arising occurs, passing away occurs, when it stands, it is subject to change.

For *maggasacca*, arising occurs, passing away occurs, when it stands, it is subject to change.

For *nirodhasacca*, arising does not occur, passing away does not occur, when it stands, it is not subject to change.²⁷⁰

²⁷⁰ Paṭis II 108: *saccānaṃ kati lakkhaṇāni. saccānaṃ dve lakkhaṇāni saṅkhatalakkhaṇaṇca asaṅkhatalakkhaṇaṇca saccānaṃ imāni dve lakkhaṇāni. saccānaṃ kati lakkhaṇāni. saccānaṃ cha lakkhaṇāni saṅkhatānaṃ saccānaṃ uppādo paññāyati vayo paññāyati ñhitānaṃ aññathattaṃ paññāyati na asaṅkhatassa saccassa uppādo paññāyati na vayo paññāyati na ñhitassa aññathattaṃ paññāyati saccānaṃ imāni cha lakkhaṇāni. saccānaṃ kati lakkhaṇāni. saccānaṃ dvādasa lakkhaṇāni dukkhasaccassa uppādo paññāyati vayo paññāyati ñhitassa aññathattaṃ paññāyati samudayasaccassa uppādo paññāyati vayo paññāyati ñhitassa aññathattaṃ paññāyati maggasaccassa uppādo paññāyati vayo paññāyati ñhitassa*

From the above passage, Achan Sermchai (2010: 232) concludes that *dukkhasacca*, *samudayasacca* and *maggasacca* are *saṅkhatadhammas*, are impermanent, therefore they are suffering and not-self. *Nirodhasacca*, only the part that is still a *kiriya* or a state that arises and passes away, as described above, is impermanent, therefore they are also suffering and not-self. However, *nirodhadhātu* or *nibbānadhātu*, the holder of the state of *nibbāna*, is an *asaṅkhatadhamma* and is beyond this world and the three characteristics (Sermchai 2010: 232).

Achan Sermchai, in providing this method of examination, not only seeks to elaborate on Sammā Arahant's understanding of *vipassanā*, but also to clarify its understanding of the limits of what is not-self.²⁷¹

4.4 Three aspects of *nibbāna*

From his analysis and systemization of Luang Pho Sot's teachings, together with his reading of the Pāli *suttas* and their commentaries, Achan Sermchai developed the concept of the three aspects of *nibbāna*. The three aspects of *nibbāna*, which Achan Sermchai developed prior to the book, *Four Noble Truths*, marked the very first time that extensive citations of the Pāli commentarial and subcommentarial literature had been presented in

aññathattaṃ paññāyati na nirodhasaccassa uppādo paññāyati na vayo paññāyati na ñitassa aññathattaṃ paññāyati saccānaṃ imāni dvādaśa lakkhaṇāni.

²⁷¹ This reference is also discussed in Potprecha (2009: 94–95) as part of Achan Sermchai's argument that *nibbāna* is self.

order to defend Sammā Arahaṃ thought and to counter criticisms that the concepts of *dhammakāya* and *āyatana (nibbāna)* in Luang Pho Sot's teachings are not consistent with Pāli textual authorities.

For example, Somdet Phra Buddhaghosācāriya (Prayudh Payutto) in the *Dhammakāya Case* (1999: 233) argues that the word *dhammakāya* is used in the Pāli canon to describe the Buddha as the source of collection and pouring out of the Dhamma (teachings), which can only be seen by the eye of wisdom (*paññācakkhu*) and is not to be seen in *samādhi*. Moreover, the word *āyatana* that refers to *nibbāna* is not to be interpreted as a place (Payutto 1999: 233). He asserts that this kind of *nibbāna* clearly does not exist in the teaching of the Buddha, and that the *nibbāna* in the Sammā Arahaṃ tradition is only a *nimitta*, an imagination that the mind creates (Payutto 1999: 233).

The appendix to *The handbook for the study of the three trainings* provides the most detailed explanation of Achan Sermchai's understanding of the three aspects of *nibbāna*. In relation to the above criticisms, the description of the three aspects of *nibbāna* is an attempt to elaborate and reinterpret Luang Pho Sot's understanding of *dhammakāya*, *nibbāna* and *āyatana (nibbāna)* and link these concepts to various terms and passages in the Pāli canon and the commentaries and subcommentaries.

1. The first aspect is *nibbāna* as 'a state' (Sermchai 2009: 360). It is a state without defilements, craving, bonds and suffering; an unconditioned *dhamma (asaṅkhatadhamma)*; permanent (*niccam*), perpetual (*dhuvam*), stable (*sassatam*) and lacking change

(*avipariṇāma dhammaṃ*); eternal, not subject to birth, aging, pain and death; the supremely happy (*paramaṃ sukhaṃ*), etc.

2. The second aspect of *nibbāna* is *nibbāna* as ‘a nature that holds the state of *nibbāna*, namely *nibbānadhātu*’.²⁷² *Nibbānadhātu* (*nibbāna* element) is synonymous with the terms *asaṅkhatadhātu* and *nirodhadhātu* and is also equated with *dhammakāya*. Achan Sermchai (2009: 385) explains that *nibbāna* in its true nature is not only a state void of defilement but also the holder of the state, which is referred to in the Pāli *suttas* and their commentaries as *nibbānadhātu*. This understanding is supported by the following commentarial statement:

Nibbāna is named *dhātu* because of the meaning of there is no being and no life and because of the meaning of the holder of the state [of *nibbāna*]; for these reasons it is named *nibbānadhātu* (see Potprecha 2009: 81).²⁷³

The equation of *nibbānadhātu* and *asaṅkhatadhātu* with *dhammakāya* in Achan Sermchai’s argument is derived from Luang Pho Sot’s understanding of *dhammakāya* as *virāgadhātu* (element without passion) and *virāgadhamma* (*dhamma* without passion) (see Saman 2000: 191). It is also influenced by Phra Phrom Muni’s (Phin Suvaco) sermon on the Three Bodies, which is cited by Achan Sermchai many times in his works. In this

²⁷² It-a I 164.

²⁷³ ชื่อว่านิพพานธาตุ เพราะพระนิพพานนั้นแล ชื่อว่าเป็นธาตุ เพราะความหมายว่าไม่มีสัตว์ ไม่มีชีวะ และเพราะความหมายว่า เป็นผู้ทรงสภาวะ [พระนิพพาน] ไว้
(It-a I 164: *tad eva nissattanijjīvaṭṭhena sabhāvadhāraṇaṭṭhena ca dhātū ti nibbānadhātu*).

sermon, Phra Phrom Muni (1984: 35–36) equates *dhammakāya* with *asaṅkhatadhamma*, the unconditioned *dhamma*.

Dhamma that is called *dhammakāya* is understood as *asaṅkhatadhamma* that is both *virāga* and *sarāga*. If it is *virāgadhamma*, it is the *dhammakāya* that is pure, if it is not yet *virāgadhamma*, it is not *dhammakāya* that is pure.²⁷⁴

3. The third aspect of *nibbāna* is *nibbāna* as ‘an unconditioned place to which the *asekha* (*arahants*) go without sorrow’ (Dhp 225–6). This aspect is what Luang Pho Sot terms *āyatana* (*nibbāna*). One of the definitions of the word *āyatana* is *vasanaṭṭhāna*, or a place of abiding or dwelling. Reference to the word *āyatana* (*nibbāna*) can be found in the Nibbāna Sutta of the Udāna (Ud 80), and in the Dhammapada, *nibbāna* is described as a place without birth and without grief (Dhp 225–6).

According to Achan Sermchai (2009: 406–7), when there is *nibbānadhātu* that possesses the state of *nibbāna*, there must be a dwelling place for *nibbānadhātu*. This dwelling place is a land void of *sankhāra*, void of the four elements, a place without birth, it does not move from one existence to another. To support his argument, Achan Sermchai also cited Luang Poo Teu Acaladhammo (1888–1974), Wat Arañña Viveka, Nakorn Panom, who was a well-respected forest monk and a disciple of Achan Man who described *nibbāna* as a place

²⁷⁴ ธรรมที่เรียกว่าธรรมกายนี้ เข้าใจว่า หมายถึงอสังขตธรรมทั้งที่เป็นวิราคะ ทั้งที่เป็นสราคะ ถ้าเป็นวิราคธรรม ก็เป็นธรรมกายที่บริสุทธิ์ ถ้ายังไม่เป็นวิราคธรรม ก็ยังไม่เป็นธรรมกายที่บริสุทธิ์.

where the Buddha is, a place where the *arahants* enter and exist. This understanding of *nibbāna* is not uncommon in Achan Man's forest tradition. As mentioned above, according to Achan Maha Boowa's biography of Achan Man, the *vimutta* or 'liberated' minds of the Buddhas and *arahants* still in some way remain after they have entered *parinibbāna* and their purified minds can assume conventional form in order to come into contact with the awakened ones who still possess the five aggregates (Maha Boowa 1971: 144–145). The understanding of *nibbāna* as a glass realm, which one can visit in meditation, is also found in the teaching of Phra Ariyakhunathan (Pusso Seng) (1950: 168), another of Achan Man's renowned students. The following passage by Luang Poo Teu is not found in Luang Pho Sot's teachings:

When he became an *arahant* and entered *nibbāna*, *nibbāna* still existed, and did not become annihilated. The Buddha entered *nibbāna* and exists in *nibbāna*.

Moggallāna, Sāriputta, Anuruddha, Ānanda entered *nibbāna* and exist in *nibbāna*. *Bhikkhunīs* are ordained in body, speech and mind; their minds are *nibbāna* and can enter *nibbāna* also. Like the moon, which does not age; the moon does not feel pain; the moon does not feel hot or cold. The stars are not born nor do they die.

People here are crazy, having long necks, white eyes and long tongues. It is no use. Whereas the *dhamma* arises from the heart of the Buddha, arises

from all the *arahants*. Why do all of us and all of them not know it? Why do we not see it? When we are *arahants*, stream enterers, non-returners, then we are able to know the place where the Buddha is, the place where the *arahants* are. (Sermchai 2009: 411; Teu 1993: 127)²⁷⁵

The three aspects of *nibbāna* can be seen as deriving from the understanding of Luang Pho Sot and also as a systemization and reinterpretation of it. Luang Pho Sot understands *nibbāna* as located within the mind of the *dhammakāya*. He also interprets the term *saupādisesa nibbānadhātu* (*nibbāna* element with the five aggregates remaining) as the minds of the *dhammakāyas* of Buddhas and *arahants* while they are still alive, and the term *anupādisesa nibbānadhātu* (*nibbāna* element without the five aggregates remaining) as the minds of the *dhammakāyas* of Buddhas and *arahants* in *āyatana* (*nibbāna*).²⁷⁶ However, Achan Sermchai sees the state of *nibbāna* within the mind of the *dhammakāya* as one aspect of *nibbāna*, and the *dhammakāya* that holds the state of *nibbāna* as another aspect of *nibbāna*. The reason why Achan Sermchai equates *dhammakāya*, the second aspect, with *nibbānadhātu* is because he sees *virāgadhātu* and *virāgadhamma*, two terms that Luang Pho Sot uses to describe *dhammakāya*, as synonymous with *nibbānadhātu*. He also sees the commentarial definition of *nibbānadhātu* as the holder of the state of *nibbāna* in

²⁷⁵ เมื่อได้เป็นพระอรหันต์แล้วเข้าพระนิพพานไปแล้ว พระนิพพานก็ยังมิอยู่ ไม่เสื่อมสูญ พระพุทธเจ้าเข้าพระนิพพานก็มีอยู่ในพระนิพพานนั้นแล
พระโมคคัลลาน์ พระสารีบุตร พระอนนฺทฺ พระอานนฺทฺ เข้าพระนิพพาน ก็มีอยู่ในพระนิพพานนั้นแล นางกสิณฺณทั้งหลายได้บวชกายาวาจา ใจ ใจก็เป็นพระนิพพาน แล้วเข้าพระนิพพานได้ด้วย เหมือนกับพระจันทร์ พระจันทร์ไม่มีวันแก่ พระจันทร์ไม่มีวันเจ็บ พระจันทร์ไม่มีร้อน ไม่มีหนาว ดาวไม่มีเกิด ไม่มีตาย
คนเรานี้เป็นบ้าเป็นบอ คอยาว ตาขาว ลิ่นยาว ไข่มุไม่ได้ ส่วนพระธรรมคำสั่งสอนเกิดจากหัวใจของพระพุทธเจ้า เกิดจากหัวใจของพระอรหันตาทั้งหลาย ทำไมเราทั้งหลายและพวกท่านทั้งหลายจึงไม่รู้ ทำไมเราจึงไม่เห็น ถ้าเราเป็นพระอรหันต์ เป็นพระโสดาบัน เป็นพระอนาคามีใด ก็เมื่อนั้นแหละจึงจะเห็นจะรู้ที่อยู่ของพระพุทธเจ้า ที่อยู่ของพระอรหันตเจ้าทั้งหลาย.

²⁷⁶ See, for example, It 38–39. For discussions regarding the two terms, see Hwang (2006: 14–35), Collins: (2010: 39–42) and Harvey (2012: 180–2).

accordance with Luang Pho Sot's description of the state of *nibbāna* as residing within the mind of the *dhammakāya*. The two terms, *dhammakāya* and *nibbānadhātu*, possess similar characteristics: *nibbānadhātu* is where qualities or states of *nibbāna* reside, and *dhammakāya* is also where realization of the Dhamma and the attainments of the Buddha resides (Sermchai 2009: 404).

The remaining references in this section are not found in Luang Pho Sot's teachings. Achan Sermchai (2009: 404–6) quotes from several commentarial passages to argue that *dhammakāya* is described as the body attained in *dhamma* and equated with nine kinds of *lokuttaradhammas*, i.e. four paths, four fruits and *nibbānadhātu*. The four paths and fruits are the attainments of each of the noble ones, which correspond to the different levels of *dhammakāya* in Sammā Arahaṃ meditation.²⁷⁷

With regard to the words of the Buddha *dhammakāyo iti pi*, for what reason is the *Tathāgata* given the name '*dhammakāya*'? Because the *Tathāgata* has conceived the *buddhavācana* that is the Tipiṭaka in his heart and has expressed it through his words. For that reason, the body of the Buddha is real *dhamma* because it is attained in *dhamma*, so he is *dhammakāya* in that *dhamma* is his body.²⁷⁸

²⁷⁷ The path and fruit of the stream enterer (*sotāpanna*), the path and fruit of the once returner (*sakadāgāmi*), the path and fruit of the non-returner (*anāgāmi*) and the path and fruit of the *arahant*.

²⁷⁸ ในพระพุทธพจน์นั้น คำว่า ธมมกาย โอติปิ มีความว่า เพราะเหตุไร พระตถาคตจึงได้รับขนานนามว่า ธรรมกาย เพราะพระตถาคตทรงคิดพระพุทธพจน์คือพระไตรปิฎกด้วยพระหทัยแล้ว ทรงนำออกแสดงด้วยพระวาจาด้วยเหตุนี้พระวรกายของพระตถาคตนั้นจึงเป็นธรรมแท้ เพราะสำเร็จด้วยธรรมพระธรรมเป็นพระวรกายของพระตถาคตนั้น ดังพรรณนານี้ ฉะนั้นพระองค์จึงเป็นธรรมกาย . (Sv III 865: *tattha dhammakāyo iti pī ti kasmā tathāgato dhammakāyo ti vutto. tathāgato hi tepiṭakaṃ buddhavacanaṃ hadayena cintetvā vācāya abhinīhari. ten' assa kāyo dhammamayattā dhammo va. iti dhammo kāyo assā ti dhammakāyo*).

In the case of the words ‘*yo kho vakkali dhammaṃ*’, here the Blessed One indicates being one whose body is *dhamma* (*dhammakāyatā*), having stated ‘Mahārāja, one whose body is *dhammakāya*, is the *tathāgatha*.’ For the nine kinds of *lokuttaradhamma* are called the body of the *tathāgatha*.²⁷⁹

The words ‘nine kinds of *lokuttaradhammas*’ are the four *magga*, four *phala* and one *nibbānadhātu* [*asaṅkhatadhātu*].²⁸⁰

Somdet Phra Buddhaghosācāriya (Prayudh Payutto) (1999: 176) interprets the word *dhammakāya* from the quotations above as the source of collection of Dhamma i.e. the teaching of the Buddha. *Dhammakāya* can only be seen by the eye of wisdom (*paññācakkhu*) and is not seen by the physical eye. Achan Sermchai responds to these arguments by explaining that *dhammakāya* is not just a collection of *dhammas* and the attainments but also, borrowing the above commentarial term, a ‘body attained in Dhamma’. When the realization of the Dhamma arises, it is not only understood by the meditator but the meditator attains, sees and becomes *dhammakāya*, the unconditioned body, as well. Both *dhammakāya*, i.e. *nibbānadhātu* and *āyatana* (*nibbāna*), can be seen by the meditator, not with the human eyes but the eye of *dhammakāya*. According to him, the first interpretation of *dhammakāya* does not contradict the second (Sermchai 2015).

²⁷⁹ ในคำว่า โย โข วกฺกलि ธมฺมํ นี้ ฟังทราบว่ พระผู้มีพระภาคเจ้าทรงแสดงว่ พระองค์เป็นธรรมกาย ที่ตรัสไว้ว่ ขอถวายพระพรมหาบพิตร ธรรมกาย แล คือ พระตถาคต ความจริง โลกุตตรธรรม ๙ อย่าง ชื่อว่เป็นพระวรกายของพระตถาคต (Spk II 314: *yo kho Vakkali dhamman ti idha bhagavā dhammakāyo kho mahārāja tathāgato ti vuttaṃ dhammakāyataṃ dasseti. navāvidho hi lokuttaradhammo tathāgatassa kāyo nāma*).

²⁸⁰ คำว่ โลกุตตรธรรม ๙ อย่าง ได้แก่ มรรค ๔ ผล ๔ และ พระนิพพานธาตุ (Dhs 193).

In the rest of the section, Achan Sermchai (2009: 407–8) provides canonical and commentarial evidence to argue that *nibbāna* can be seen in meditation. The following quotations are taken from the Kevaṭṭa Sutta (D I 211):

[*Nibbāna*] that can be realized is *anidassa* [cannot be seen with the physical eyes], *ananta* [endless without arising and passing away] and has bright radiance clearer and purer than all other *dhammas*.²⁸¹

The Buddha also states this in the Udāna (Ud 6):

Water, earth, fire and wind do not stand in *nibbāna*. In that *nibbāna*, stars' rays do not reach it, sunshine does not reach it, the moon's rays do not reach it, [but] there is no darkness in *nibbāna*.²⁸²

Achan Sermchai (2009: 408) interprets the above statements as indicating that *nibbāna* is an unconditioned *dhamma* that cannot be seen by human, *deva* or *brahmā* eyes, but if it cannot be seen at all, the Buddha would not have described it as having a bright and clear

²⁸¹ [นิพพาน] อันผู้บรรลุพึงรู้แจ้งได้ เป็น อนิหัสสนะ [ไม่เห็นได้ด้วยจักขุวิญญาณ] เป็นอนันตะ [ไม่มีที่สิ้นสุด แห่งความเกิดขึ้นและความเสื่อมไป] มีรัศมี สว่างโชติช่วง ไสบริสุทธ์กว่าธรรมทั้งปวง (D I 211: *viññāṇaṃ anidassanaṃ anantaṃ sabbaṃ pabhaṃ*).

²⁸² น้ำ ดิน ไฟ และลม ไม่ตั้งอยู่ในนิพพานใดในนิพพานนั้นดาวส่องไปไม่ถึง พระอาทิตย์ส่องแสงไม่ถึง พระจันทร์ก็ส่องแสงไม่ถึง .แต่ความมืดก็ไม่มีในนิพพานนั้น (Ud 6: *yattha āpo ca paṭhavī tejo vāyo na gādhati na tattha sukkā jotanti ādicco nappakāsati na tattha candimā bhāti tamo tattha na vijjati*).

radiance and without darkness. It is to be seen by *paññācakkhu*, realized with wisdom and also seen with the eyes of *dhammakāya*.

Furthermore, the commentaries describe *nibbāna* as bright, clear and pure, and can be seen by the noble ones. The following quotations are taken from *Papañcasūdanī* and *Saddhammappakāsinī*:

In this saying, the word *viññāṇaṃ* means what should be cognized. The word *anidassanaṃ* means cannot be seen as it cannot enter the realm of eye consciousness. [The Buddha] refers only to *nibbāna* with these two words. The word *anantaṃ* means this *nibbāna* is without a limit, as it is without the limits of arising and passing away.

It is true as the Lord Buddha stated:

There is an end to all beings, [but] *nibbāna* is a nature with no birth and no end. There appears an end to beings and I have stated that end.

The word *sabbatopabhaṃ* means total bright light in all respects. There is no other *dhamma* that has a brighter light, more radiance, that is purer, whiter or clearer than *nibbāna*.²⁸³

²⁸³ Ps II 413: *tattha viññāṇan ti vijānitabbaṃ. anidassanan ti cakkhuvīññāṇassa āpāthaṃ anupagamanato anidassanaṃ nāma. padadvayena pi nibbānaṃ eva vuttaṃ. anantan ti tay' idaṃ uppādavaya antarahitattā anantaṃ nāma. vuttaṃ pi h' etaṃ: antavantāni bhūtāni, asambhūtaṃ anantaṃ. bhūte antāni dissantibhūte*

The word *dassanaṃ* means *sotāpattimagga*. *Sotāpattimagga* is stated as *dassanaṃ* because *nibbāna* is first seen. Even though it is true that *gotrabhuñña* also sees *nibbāna*, it is stated as ‘not yet seen’ because the defilements that should be abandoned have not yet been abandoned. Like a man arriving at the palace of a king for a certain business, even though he saw the king on an elephant’s neck on the road from afar, when he is asked ‘Have you met the king?’, he answers, ‘No, I have not yet met the king’ because the business to be done has not yet been done. *Gotrabhuñña* thus stands as *āvajjanacitta* of *maggā*.²⁸⁴

4.5 Harmonization with other meditation traditions

Another book worth mentioning is *The handbook of the 5 traditions of samatha vipassanā kammaṭṭhāna* published by Wat Luang Pho Sot Thammakayaram in 2010.²⁸⁵ This is a compilation of the basic meditation teachings of the five popular methods found in Thailand: ‘Buddho’, ‘Ānāpānasati’, ‘Rise and Fall’, ‘Rūpa Nāma’ and ‘Sammā Arahaṃ’. Achan Sermchai commissioned this book on behalf of the National Coordination Centre of the Provincial Meditation Institute of Thailand, of which he is the chairman. It serves as a

antā pakāsitā ti. sabbatopabhan ti sabbaso pabhāsampannaṃ. nibbānato hi añño dhammo sapabhātaro vā jotivantataro vā parisuddhataro vā paṇḍarataro vā natthi ti.

²⁸⁴ Paṭi-a I 282: *dassanaṃ ti hi sotāpattimaggo. so hi paṭhamaṃ nibbānadassanto dassananti vutto. gotrabhū pana kiñcāpi paṭhamataraṃ nibbānaṃ passati, yathā pana rañño santikaṃ kenacid eva karaṇīyena āgato purise dūrato va rathikāya carantaṃ hatthikkhandhagataṃ rājānaṃ disvā pi, tiṭṭho te rājāti puṭṭho, disvā kattabbakiccassa ekatattā na passāmī ti āha. evam eva nibbānaṃ disvā kattabbassa kilesappahānassa abhāvā na dassanaṃ ti vuccati. taṃ hi ñānaṃ maggassa āvajjanaṭṭhāne tiṭṭhati.*

²⁸⁵ คู่มือปฏิบัติสมถะวิปัสสนากัมมัฏฐาน ๕ สาย.

guidebook for meditation teachers and practitioners to be distributed in Ratchaburi and its surrounding provinces. It is divided into five chapters, each chapter covering the basic method of each of the five traditions. The first chapter, ‘Buddho method’, is written by Achan Sing (Khantayāgamo) and based on the meditation teachings of Achan Man Bhūridatta and his student, Achan Phut (Ṭhāniyo); the second chapter, ‘Ānāpānasati method’, is taken from Buddhadasa Bhikkhu’s teaching on the mindfulness of breath; the third chapter, ‘Rise and Fall method’, is from the meditation teaching of Achan Chodok Ñānasiddhi; the fourth chapter, ‘Rūpa Nāma method’, is an explanation of another ‘bare insight’ method based on the teachings of Achan Wikrom Muni (Phon Upatisso) and Upāsikā Naep Mahaniranon, a famous female lay meditation teacher. This method does not consist in observing the abdomen but begins by contemplating the different types of mental and physical objects that come into contact with the mind. The last chapter consists of Luang Pho Sot’s and Achan Sermchai’s teachings on Sammā Arahaṃ meditation. In compiling this book, Achan Sermchai (2015) states that he is attempting to create harmony and prevent discord among the various meditation traditions in Thailand. According to him, all the popular meditation methods in Thailand that are based on the Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta, including Sammā Arahaṃ meditation, are valid methods that lead to *nibbāna* (Sermchai 2015). As mentioned above, Achan Sermchai views the practice of the *satipaṭṭhānas* as the ‘only path’ to *nibbāna*. However, he explains that just as one can choose to travel via various means and paths to the same destination, there are various ways to practise the *satipaṭṭhānas*, but all of the different methods ultimately lead to the same destination, i.e. *nibbāna* (Sermchai 2015).

4.6 Debates and discussions among the different lineages of Sammā Arahaṃ tradition

Bowers (1996: 68), Mackenzie (2007: 231) and Newell (2008: 233), in their analyses of Wat Luang Pho Sot Thammakayaram, make a distinction between the meditation systems taught at Wat Luang Pho Sot and that taught at Dhammakaya Temple, with all concluding that at Wat Luang Pho Sot, higher levels of meditation are disclosed and encouraged by the abbot, Achan Sermchai, than at Dhammakaya Temple, which focuses mainly on the basic technique for the masses. However, none of them attempt to discuss the different interpretations regarding other aspects of Sammā Arahaṃ meditation among the different lineages of the tradition. In this section, I gather the opinions and discussions from individuals whom I view as representatives of the various lineages of the Sammā Arahaṃ tradition regarding two particular issues: 1) the existence of a prior five-body system in Luang Pho Sot's teaching; and 2) the practice of offering food directly to the Buddha in (*āyatana*) *nibbāna*. These representatives are: 1) *mae chi* Wanchai Chukorn; 2) Achan Sermchai; 3) Chanida Jantrasrisalai; and 4) Chali Chotsuwan.

Mae chi Wanchai started practising Sammā Arahaṃ meditation in 1952 at the age of 12, becoming a *mae chi* at Wat Paknam in 1958 at the age of 18, one year before Luang Pho Sot died. Today, she is among one of the few living direct pupils of Luang Pho Sot and resides both at Wat Paknam and the Suan Kaeo Meditation Centre, a *mae chi* centre, which she founded in 1997. Chanida Jantrasrisalai is a member and researcher of Dhammakaya Temple's Dhammachai Research Institute and the editor and contributor of Dhammachai Research Institute's publications. Chali Chotsuwan is a lay meditation teacher in the

lineage of *mae chi* Thongsuk Samdaengpan and Achan Karun Bunmanut. As mentioned above, Achan Karun was a prominent lay student of *mae chi* Thongsuk and *mae chi* Thanom Asawai based in Chantaburi province. Achan Karun was one of the founders of the Dhamma Prasit Foundation, a meditation group that later evolved into Wat Phra Dhammakāya. Like Achan Sermchai, Achan Karun left the movement in its formative years due to disagreements with other members of the group. Chali is one of Achan Karun's senior pupils. He now works as a schoolteacher and regularly teaches Sammā Arahāṃ meditation at Wat Moli Lokayaram, Thonburi. The first three figures are representatives of the three main lineages of the Sammā Arahāṃ tradition: 1) Wat Paknam, 2) Dhammakaya Temple and 3) Wat Luang Pho Sot. I have added Chali Chotsuwan's views to this section as his understanding of Sammā Arahāṃ meditation reflects that of *mae chi* Thongsuk and Achan Karun without the influence of Dhammakaya Temple.

This section demonstrates that among the various lineages of Sammā Arahāṃ tradition, there are differing opinions and interpretations regarding aspects of Sammā Arahāṃ practices. Even though every lineage in a meditation tradition proclaims the authenticity of the teachings of the founder, the networks of teachers and students intermingling and exchanging ideas often creates a variation in the interpretations of the founder's meditation teachings, which originate from different emphases and personal interpretations of the teachers. This is one of the ways differing interpretations in the same meditation tradition develop, and sometimes this can result in new practices introduced by the teachers and students themselves.

4.6.1 The debate on the existence of a prior five-body system in Luang Pho Sot's teaching

In an article published online in 2010 titled ‘What is the background of the practice of entering the inner bodies up to 18 bodies?’, Chali Chotsuwan discusses the evidence for an earlier five-body system in Luang Pho Sot's teachings.²⁸⁶ This article appears on his meditation website, Khun Samatha. The website aims to provide comprehensive teachings of Luang Pho Sot and various books and articles regarding Sammā Arahaṃ meditation by Achan Karun.

In this article, Chali observes that in *Abbot's handbook*, written in November 1948, only five inner bodies and one sphere per body are mentioned, namely: 1) human body and *paṭhamamagga* sphere; 2) *deva* body and *dutiyamagga* sphere; 3) *brahmā* body and *tatiyamagga* sphere; 4) *arūpabrahmā* body and *cattuthamagga* sphere; and 5) *dhammakāya* (Chali 2010).²⁸⁷

There is no mention of any refined body and different levels of *dhammakāya* and no mention of the inner spheres of *sīla*, *samādhi*, *paññā*, *vimutti* and *vimuttiñāṇadassana*. I find this omission interesting as this book is meant to be a comprehensive summary of

²⁸⁶ การเดินวิชชาเข้าภายในกาย จนถึง๑๘กาย มีความเป็นมาอย่างไร. The article, published only online in 2010, can be downloaded at: <http://group.wunjun.com/khunsamatha/topic/301991-8825>

²⁸⁷ คู่มือสมาธิ This reference can be found in the *63 sermons* collection (1984: (303)). As mentioned above, the *Abbot's handbook* is a summary of the higher levels of Sammā Arahaṃ meditation compiled by three lay meditation pupils of Luang Pho Sot, namely Nawarat Hiranrak, Somsong Sutsakhon and Chaluai Sombatsuk. It was published by order of the Supreme Patriarch Somdet Phra Wachirayanawong, the abbot of Wat Bowonniwet.

Sammā Arahaṃ meditation written for the Supreme Patriarch. If Luang Pho Sot was teaching 18 bodies and six spheres at that time, he would not have left them out.

Chali (2010) goes on to cite a sermon given in March 1948, the same year as the publication of the *Abbot's handbook*, which mentions only five bodies and six spheres. Titled Ratanattayagamanapaṇāmagāthā, the sermon lists five bodies as above (human, *deva*, *brahmā*, *arūpabrahmā* and *dhammakāya*), but unlike the *Abbot's handbook* it mentions all of the six spheres for each body (*dhamma*, *sīla*, *samādhi*, *paññā*, *vimutti* and *vimuttiñāṇadassana*) (Chali 2010; 63 sermons 1984: 50).²⁸⁸ Although this sermon was given eight months earlier than the *Abbot's handbook*, Chali (2010) believes that the content of the *Abbot's handbook* is based on an earlier material as the *Abbot's handbook* only contains one sphere for each body whereas this sermon lists all six spheres.

There are two more works listed by Chali that mention only five bodies as above, namely *Complete maggaphala training* and *Complete maggaphala training 2* (Chali 2010; Mongkhon Thepmuni 1973 and 1975).²⁸⁹ The first volume was compiled by Phra Mahā Chan in 1937 and published in July 1973. The second volume was compiled by Achan Wira Gaṇuttamo, the late deputy abbot of Wat Paknam and Achan Sermchai's meditation teacher, and was published in 1975. These two volumes, like the *Abbot's handbook*, aim to provide a summary of higher stages of Sammā Arahaṃ meditation but are only

²⁸⁸ รัตนัตถยคมนปณามคาถา.

²⁸⁹ วิชขามรรคผลพิสดาร and วิชขามรรคผลพิสดาร ๒. Both books are published in Bangkok by Wat Paknam. The contents of these two books are not meant for the general public and so are not included in the 63 sermons collection. However, I was able to obtain them to check the references (Mongkhon Thepmuni 1973: 1 and 1975: 23–4).

distributed among those who have completed the 18-body stage. Both volumes only mention five bodies and one sphere per body. They also use a term unheard of in Luang Pho Sot's later teachings. The five bodies are listed: 1) human; 2) *deva*; 3) coarse *paṭhama viññāṇa* body;²⁹⁰ 4) refined *paṭhama viññāṇa* body;²⁹¹ and 5) *dhammakāya* (Chali 2010). The coarse and refined *paṭhama viññāṇa* bodies are used instead of *brahmā* and formless *brahmā* bodies. The two volumes also talk about 'refined *dhammakāyas*' that are to be attained beyond the first *dhammakāya*; however, they do not name the different levels of *dhammakāya* as corresponding to the different types of noble ones (*ariya*) (Mongkhon Thepmuni 1973: 1 and 1975: 23–4).

I also find this omission interesting as these two books aim to offer 'complete' guidelines to higher levels of Sammā Arahaṃ meditation. Again, I would suggest that if Luang Pho Sot was teaching 18 bodies and six spheres at that time, he would not have left them out. Moreover, instead of *brahmā* body, Luang Pho Sot in both volumes calls it the coarse first consciousness body, and instead of *arūpabrahmā* body, Luang Pho Sot calls it the refined first consciousness body. The first volume of this book was compiled in 1937 and represents the earliest published teachings of Luang Pho Sot. The compilation date of the second volume is unknown. The compiler, Achan Wira, became a pupil of Luang Pho Sot in 1953. However, Chali (2010) believes that, like the first volume, the material for this volume is also based on teachings earlier than the *Abbot's handbook* and is probably around the same year as the first volume. He thinks that the list in these two volumes must be based

²⁹⁰ กายปฐมวิญญานเหยาบ

²⁹¹ กายปฐมวิญญานละเอียด

on the earliest known teachings of Luang Pho Sot, prior to the development of the terms *brahmā* and *arūpabrahmā* bodies, i.e. prior to the *Abbot's handbook* in 1948 (Chali 2010). The term *paṭhama viññāṇa* body does not appear in any other works of Luang Pho Sot and may be derived from 'older sources' (Chali 2010). He concludes that prior to developing the 18-body system, Luang Pho Sot first taught a five-body and one-sphere system, followed by a five-body and six-sphere system (Chali 2010). According to him, the first evidence of the 18-body system appears in sermons given in 1952 (Chali 2010). Thus, he concludes that the complete Sammā Arahaṃ system as we know it first came into existence in 1952 (Chali 2010).

Apart from these three works and sermon, I have found another work that mentions only five bodies and one sphere. Published in October 1955 and titled *The topic of dhammakāya*, the book consists of a short biography of Luang Pho Sot, the sermon on the qualities of the Triple Gems given in 1955 and a summary of Sammā Arahaṃ meditation given in 1945 (Mongkhon Ratchamuni 1955).²⁹² The book is compiled by Phra Thip Parinya (Thup Kalamphasut), a lay pupil of Luang Pho Sot and former monk at Wat Mahathat. The nine-page summary, transcribed from an audio recording in April 1945, lists five bodies as follows: 1) human; 2) *deva*; 3) *brahmā*; 4) *arūpabrahmā*; 5) *dhammakāya* (Mongkhon Ratchamuni 1955: 140). It also talks about only one sphere, namely the *paṭhamamagga* or

²⁹² เรื่องธรรมกาย. The book covers 149 pages and was published in Bangkok by Mahachulalongkorn Buddhist University on the occasion of Luang Pho Sot's sixth cycle. The sermon is titled พระพุทธคุณ พระธรรมคุณ พระสังฆคุณ or the Qualities of the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha. It is one of the best-known sermons of Luang Pho Sot and is listed first in the *63 sermons* collection (Dhammakaya Buddhist Meditation Foundation 1984: 8–44). Phra Thip Parinya was one of Luang Pho Sot's senior lay meditation students. He became a monk at Wat Mahathat, disrobed at the age of 22 and later became a judge. He continued to practise meditation and remained a pupil of Luang Pho Sot throughout his life.

dhamma sphere (Mongkhon Ratchamuni 1955: 140). There is no mention of *dutiyamagga*, *tatiyamagga* and *cattuthamagga* spheres as in the *Abbot's handbook*. There is also no mention of the refined bodies, different levels of *dhammakāya* or the inner spheres of *sīla*, *samādhi*, *paññā*, *vimutti* and *vimuttiñāṇadassana*. The summary was recorded in 1945, three years before the *Abbot's handbook* and the sermon, *Ratanattayagamanapaṇāmagāthā*, and eight years after the compilation of the first volume of *Complete maggaphala training*. Thus, this evidence seems to support Chali's conclusion as the summary falls during the period between the first recorded teachings (prior to the terms *brahmā* and *arūpabrahmā* bodies) and the development of one sphere per body (*Abbot's handbook*) and the six inner spheres (*Ratanattayagamanapaṇāmagāthā*).

In my interview with Achan Sermchai at Wat Luang Pho Sot Thammakayaram, Ratchaburi, on 21 November 2016, he confirmed that Luang Pho Sot definitely taught a five-body and one-sphere system first and, as he continued to discover more and more refined bodies and spheres in meditation, later developed the system into 18 bodies and six spheres. Achan Sermchai (2016) agrees with Chali that both volumes of *Complete maggaphala training* provide evidence for this. He himself was among the people responsible for publishing the first volume, and the second volume was compiled by his teacher Achan Wira Gaṇuttamo (Sermchai 2016). However, he did not know in which year Luang Pho Sot introduced the 18-body system. Achan Sermchai goes on to clarify the usage of the terms 'coarse' and 'refined' *paṭhama viññāṇa* bodies (first consciousness bodies), which Luang Pho Sot uses in both volumes prior to the terms *brahmā* and *arūpabrahmā* bodies. He states that these terms refer to the original bodies or

dhātudhamma of human beings (Sermchai 2016). When the world was destroyed by the elements at the end of each aeon (*kappa*), only a few heavens in the *brahmā* and formless *brahmā* realms survived (Sermchai 2016). Later, when the lower realms were formed again, these *brahmās* came down and tasted the earth's savoury substances, which made their bodies less refined (Sermchai 2016). Gradually these beings became human beings (Sermchai 2016). Thus, according to Achan Sermchai, the first consciousness bodies were the *brahmā* and formless *brahmā* bodies as these beings were the origins of human beings. This story of the beginning of human life on earth is found in the second part of the Aggañña Sutta (D III 80). As for the origin of the term *paṭhama viññāṇa* body, Achan Sermchai (2016) speculates that it probably came from a much older source.

I also discussed this issue with Chanida Jantrasrisalai. She believes that it is possible that Luang Pho Sot taught a five-body system prior to the 18-body system. However, she questions Chali's conclusion that 1952 was the year of the introduction of the 18-body system (Chanida Jantrasrisalai, November 22, 2016, e-mail message to the author). She explains that *mae chi* Chan, the founder of Dhammakaya Temple, started practising Sammā Arahaṃ meditation with *mae chi* Thongsuk in 1934 and with Luang Pho Sot in 1937, and in all of her recorded teachings, she never mentioned that Luang Pho Sot taught an earlier five-body system (Chanida Jantrasrisalai, November 22, 2016, e-mail message to the author). She has always practised and taught the 18-body system. Chanida believes that had Luang Pho Sot ever taught a five-body system, he would have switched to the 18-body system long before the Second World War and prior to *mae chi* Chan becoming *mae chi* Thongsuk's pupil (Chanida Jantrasrisalai, November 22, 2016, e-mail message to the

author). Alternatively, she proposes that these mentions of five bodies and one sphere could have been merely a concise summary and providing of examples (Chanida Jantrasrisalai, November 22, 2016, e-mail message to the author).

In my interview with *mae chi* Wanchai Chukon, she argued that most of this evidence is adduced by various pupils of Luang Pho Sot and does not constitute the direct words of Luang Pho Sot himself.²⁹³ She informs me that she started practising Sammā Arahaṃ meditation in 1945 at the age of 12, and Luang Pho Sot had always taught her the 18-body system (Wanchai 2016). She has never heard from anyone that he ever taught a five-body system (Wanchai 2016). *Mae chi* Wanchai's year of 1945 is the same year as the *Topic of dhammakāya*, after *Complete maggaphala training*, but prior to the *Abbot's handbook* and the sermon *Ratanattayagamanapaṇāmagāthā*.

In my opinion, it is still inconclusive whether or not Luang Pho Sot taught a five-body and one-sphere system prior to developing the 18-body and six-sphere system. The textual evidence cited by Chali, the additional evidence I have found and the confirmation by Achan Sermchai do seem to give weight to the hypothesis. The *Abbot's handbook* and *Complete maggaphala training* are detailed guidelines of Sammā Arahaṃ meditation written for the Supreme Patriarch and advanced practitioners, respectively. The sermon, *Ratanattayagamanapaṇāmagāthā*, is also very detailed and reads like a meditation session, in which Luang Pho Sot seems to be guiding practitioners through each sphere and body.

²⁹³ Interview at Wat Paknam on 27 November 2016. *Mae chi* Wan Chai (1933–) is the founder of the Suan Kao Meditation Centre in Ratchaburi. She currently resides at Suan Kao and Wat Paknam.

The references to the bodies and spheres in the four works cited are parts of step-by-step guides to reaching *dhammakāya*, and nowhere do they state that these lists are only concise summaries or examples. However, having discussed this issue with Chanida and interviewed *mae chi* Wanchai, who is a direct pupil of Luang Pho Sot, it is not possible to draw a definite conclusion as to whether or not Luang Pho Sot taught a prior five-body system. I also question the year 1952 proposed by Chali. Had Luang Pho Sot introduced the 18-body system for the first time in 1952, *mae chi* Wanchai should have been instructed in the five-body system. *Mae chi* Chan's introduction to the tradition was in 1934, even before the compilation date of the first *Complete maggaphala training*. However, it is possible that *mae chi* Chan initially practised the five-body system and later switched to the 18-body system but did not talk about this. It is also possible that for a period of time, Luang Pho Sot may have taught the five-body system in conjunction with the 18-body system before switching completely to the 18-body system.

4.6.2 Debate on the practice of offering food to the Buddha in (*āyatana*) *nibbāna*

Unlike the above debate, whose details are known and discussed by only a few practitioners, the practice of purifying food and offering it directly to the Buddha in (*āyatana*) *nibbāna* has been the subject of many heated discussions among Sammā Arahant practitioners. This is partly due to the fact that the practice did not originate from Luang Pho Sot himself but from two of his immediate pupils, namely *mae chi* Thongsuk and *mae chi* Chan. As I mentioned above, *mae chi* Thongsuk was a senior meditation instructor at Wat Paknam who was responsible for teaching many female students of Luang Pho Sot

including *mae chi* Chan, the founder of Dhammakaya Temple, and *Bhikṣuṇī* Voramai Kabilsingh. It is also due to the fact that this practice at Dhammakaya Temple drew a lot of criticisms from the media during the temple's crisis around the year 1999.

The origin of this practice is recorded in the book *Persons of original vijjā vol. 2*, a compilation of biographies of Luang Pho Sot's immediate students.²⁹⁴ As part of *mae chi* Thongsuk's biography, there is a small section titled 'The offering of food to the Buddha is one of the most important practices *mae chi* Chan and *mae chi* Thongsuk developed' (Singhon 2008: 66–7).²⁹⁵ Singhon cites *mae chi* Chan as follows:

Back then when I was living in the province, I used to build sand *cetiya*s.

After I came to live at Wat Paknam for two to three years, as it is surrounded by canals, I saw boats carrying sand for the construction of temple *cetiya*s passing by. So I obtained some sand to build a *cetiya* and invited *mae chi* Thongsuk to offer it to the Buddha in *nibbāna*. I clearly saw that it was possible. (Singhon 2008: 66)²⁹⁶

The above passage and this book are also cited in Dhammayaka Temple's biography of *mae chi* Chan.²⁹⁷ From then on, according to Singhon (2008: 66), *mae chi* Thongsuk and

²⁹⁴ บุคคลต้นวิชา ๒.

²⁹⁵ การบูชาข้าวพระเป็นวิชาที่สำคัญที่สุดวิชาหนึ่งแม่ชีจันทร์และแม่ชีทองสุขได้ค้นคว้าขึ้น.

²⁹⁶ สมัยก่อนอยู่บ้านนอกเคยก่อเจดีย์ทราย พอมาอยู่วัดปากน้ำ ประมาณ ๒-๓ ปี ที่วัดปากน้ำมีคลองรอบๆ เห็นเรือบรรทุกทรายผ่านมาข้างวัด เพื่อใช้กองเป็นเจดีย์ทรายในวัด จึงเอาทรายมาก่อเป็นพระเจดีย์ แล้วชวนแม่ชีทองสุขนำขึ้นไปถวายพระพุทธเจ้าบนนิพพาน เห็นชัดเจนว่าสามารถนำขึ้นไปได้.

²⁹⁷ www.kalyanamitra.org.

mae chi Chan would offer food to the Buddha once a week on every Buddhist day. They would put the food and other offerings into new dishes, meditate to purify them, then collect them and offer them directly to all the Buddhas in *nibbāna* (Singhon 2008: 66). Both *mae chis* believed that the essence of their offerings was able to enter *nibbāna* and given directly to the *dhammakāyas* of the Buddhas. *Mae chi* Chan continued this practice at Wat Paknam after *mae chi* Thongsuk's death and handed it down to Phra Dhammajayo, who performed it at Dhammakaya Temple and its branches up to the present day. Dhammakaya Temple and all its branches perform the offerings to the Buddha every first Sunday of the month at exactly the same time. The temple claims that all participants gain 'immeasurable merits' as the offerings are given directly to the Buddhas in *nibbāna*. On Dhammakaya Temple's website, www.kalyanamitra.org, the temple describes the practice as follows:

Offering food to the Buddha means taking the offerings, namely flowers, incense, candles, food and sweets, which are coarse objects, and through *witcha* Dhammakaya [Sammā Arahaṃ meditation], purifying them until these offerings become clear and refined, as refined as the *dhammakāya*, and giving them to the *dhammakāyas* of the Buddhas in *āyatana* (*nibbāna*) as *buddhapūjā*. The *dhammakāyas* of the Buddhas, unlike human beings, do not need to consume or use these offerings but enjoy the happiness of the pure *dhammadhātu*, being always fulfilled. We are making these

offerings as *buddhapūjā*, in order for us to gain merit and perfection.

(Dhammakaya Temple 2017)²⁹⁸

However, some teachers in the *Sammā Arahaṃ* tradition who are not direct pupils or part of the lineages of *mae chi* Thongsuk and *mae chi* Chan do not practise it and are sceptical about the doctrinal accuracy of the practice. In my interview with *mae chi* Wanchai Chukon (2016), she informs me that Luang Pho Sot did not initiate this practice and that she has never heard Luang Pho Sot give his approval of it. She states that *mae chi* Thongsuk and *mae chi* Chan, who were her seniors at Wat Paknam, ‘liked the supernatural’ (ชอบอภินิหาร), and attracted a lot of followers from practising it (Wanchai 2016). However, she has always stayed away from this kind of practice and meditated solely to gain wisdom and to overcome defilements (Wanchai 2016). As to whether or not the practice is possible, she states that some people believe it is possible, but she does not (Wanchai 2016).

Achan Sermchai (1999: 450), answering the question ‘would merits be gained from purifying offerings and giving them to the Buddha in *nibbāna*?’, explains that the purifying of the offerings for them to enter *nibbāna* cannot doctrinally and practically be done.²⁹⁹ He states that all *dhammas* in *āyatana* (*nibbāna*) are *asaṅkhatadhātu* and *asaṅkhatadhamma*, are unconditioned and not made up of the four elements. All *saṅkhāradhammas* in the three

²⁹⁸ การบูชาข้าวพระ คือการนำเครื่องไทยธรรม อันมีดอกไม้ธูปเทียน อาหารคาวหวานซึ่งเป็นของหยาบ นำมากลั่น ให้ละเอียดด้วย วิชชาธรรมกาย จนกระทั่งเครื่องไทยธรรมเหล่านี้ละเอียด สิบบริสุทธิเท่ากับพระธรรมกาย แล้วจึงน้อมนำไป ถวายเป็นพุทธบูชาแด่ พระธรรมกายของพระพุทธเจ้าในอายตณนิพพาน แต่ธรรมกายของพระพุทธเจ้านั้นท่านไม่ต้องฉันเหมือน มนุษย์ท่านมีสุขอยู่ด้วยธรรม ธาต อันบริสุทธิ์ อิ่มอยู่เสมอ ที่เราเอาไปถวายนี้เป็นพุทธบูชา เพื่อต้องการบุญบารมี.

²⁹⁹ การกลั่นเครื่องไทยทานถวายพระพุทธเจ้าบนนิพพาน ได้บุญจริงหรือ.

realms, however, are conditioned and can never enter *nibbāna* (Sermchai 1999: 450). He then quotes from the Udāna (80) passage regarding *nibbāna* as an ‘*āyatana*’:

There is, monks, *āyatana* where there is neither earth, nor water, nor fire, nor wind, nor that base consisting of endless space, nor that base consisting of endless consciousness, nor that base consisting of nothingness, nor that base consisting of neither perception nor non-perception, nor this world, nor the next world, nor both sun and moon in that *āyatana*. Monks, I do not speak of that *āyatana* that it is coming, or going, or remaining, or falling, or arising. That *āyatana* is without foundation, without occurrence, without object. This is the end of *dukkha*.

This passage is also cited by Luang Pho Sot in his description of *āyatana* (*nibbāna*) (for example, 63 *Sermons* 1984: (319–20)). The practice therefore contradicts this statement and Luang Pho Sot’s understanding of *āyatana* (*nibbāna*). He goes on to clarify that it is possible to purify offerings in meditation, but their essence cannot achieve a purity beyond that of *deva* objects (ของทิพย์), i.e. things used and consumed by *devas*, which are still *sāṅkhāra* and made up of the four elements (Sermchai 1999: 451). Just as the human, *deva*, *brahmā* and formless *brahmā* bodies of the practitioner cannot go beyond the conditioned realm, worldly objects that have been purified in meditation can never reach the unconditioned *nibbāna* (Sermchai 1999: 451). Achan Sermchai also questions the claim that countless merits would be gained from making the offering. He argues that as the offerings do not reach the Buddha in *nibbāna*, the merits gained from this would be

equivalent to making an offering and paying respect to the Buddha image, and recollecting the Buddha's qualities (Sermchai 1999: 454). Similarly to *mae chi* Wanchai's statement above, he adds that while Luang Pho Sot was still alive, he never taught anyone to perform this kind of offering nor informed them that they would gain countless merits from doing so (Sermchai 1999: 456).

I asked Chanida Jantrasrisalai, a member of the Dhammachai International Research Institute (DIRI), about Dhammakaya Temple's current practice and doctrinal stance on this. She stated that the temple's practice remains exactly the same i.e. offerings are still being purified in meditation and offered to the Buddha in (*āyatana*) *nibbāna*, but over the years the DIRI compiled as much textual evidence as it could to support all the temple's practices. This attempt culminated in the book titled *Questions-answers regarding dhammakāya 1*, published by the DIRI in 2015.³⁰⁰ Under the section regarding the practice of offering food to the Buddha, the book does not go into details concerning the purification of offerings in meditation and giving them to the Buddhas in *nibbāna*. This, according to Chanida, is within the realm of advanced-level meditation and beyond DIRI researchers' experience and comprehension. Instead, the book redefines the practice in scriptural terms as 'the offering of *dāna* objects, for example fine food and water, to the *saṅgha* headed by the Buddha' (Dhammachai International Research Institute 2015: 67). This definition is

³⁰⁰ ถาม-ตอบข้อสงสัยเรื่องธรรมกาย 1. The 120-page book, similarly to Achan Sermchai's 1999 Answering Questions Regarding Dhamma Practice, is presented in a question-and-answer format. The first section (7–65) provides answers regarding *dhammakāya* and various aspects of *Sammā Arahaṃ* meditation, while the second section (66–76) presents answers regarding the practice of offering food to the Buddha and the origins of various Buddha images at the temple. The book is written by a team of researchers at the DIRI and edited by Phra Khru Withetsuthammayan (Sutham Sudhammo), who at the time of publication was the assistant abbot of Dhammakaya Temple.

taken from the commentary to the Dakkhiṇāvibhaṅga Sutta (Ps V 73). It then proceeds to argue that this kind of offering, even in the absence of the Buddha, can generate the highest merits.

The book explains that even though the Buddha has already entered *nibbāna* and can neither consume nor use the offerings, the merits gained are equal to those offered to the living Buddha because 1) ‘they are offered in order to pay respect to his qualities’ and 2) ‘the mind of the giver is more refined than performing ordinary offerings as it is endowed with wisdom arising from mental clarity’ (Dhammachai International Research Institute 2015: 67). In support of this claim, the book cites a Pāli verse from the canonical text Vimānavatthu (Vv 801): ‘[W]hether the Buddha is living or has entered *nibbāna*, when the state of mind is the same, then the fruit of the offering is the same’ (Dhammachai International Research Institute 2015: 67).³⁰¹

The book, then, summarizes passages from the Dakkhiṇāvibhaṅga Sutta (M III 255) and its commentary (Ps V 73), in which the Buddha refuses robes offered to him by his maternal aunt Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī and advises her to present them to the *saṅgha*. In giving them to the *saṅgha*, the Buddha states that she would be giving the *dāna* both to him and the *saṅgha*, which is described in the commentary as the highest kind of offering (Dhammachai International Research Institute 2015: 67–8). The book explains that according to the commentary (Ps V 73), ‘*saṅgha*’ here refers to the two communities of *bhikkhus* and

³⁰¹ Dh-p-a III 253: *tiṭṭhante nibbute vāpi same citte samaṃ phalaṃ*. The verse is also quoted in the Dhammapada commentary (Dhp-a III 253) and in the Maṅgaṭṭhadīpanī. The book does not state where this verse comes from. As it is quite a well-known verse, it is assumed that the reader is familiar with it.

bhikkhunīs headed by the Buddha (Dhammachai International Research Institute 2015: 67–8). In the case that the Buddha has passed away into final *nibbāna*, the commentary instructs that the offerings should be made to the *saṅgha* in front of the relics of the Buddha contained in an image (Dhammachai International Research Institute 2015: 68).³⁰² Thus, in redefining the practice in accordance with the Dakkhiṇāvibhaṅga Sutta, the book does not attempt to defend the temple’s practice and whether or not the offerings can reach the Buddha, but is able to argue that an offering made in the Buddha’s absence, whether in the Dhammakaya Temple’s way or any other ways, as long as the above conditions are met, can also generate the highest merits.

Dhammakaya Temple and its branches are not the only groups that perform the offering. I asked Chali Chotsuwan and Phra Khru Phawana Sitthikhun (Bancha Sirivijjayo), the abbot of Wat Mongkhonthep, and they both believe that the practice is possible. Chali participated in the *dāna* performed by his meditation teacher, Achan Karun Bunmanut, who inherited the practice from his teacher, *mae chi* Thongsuk. Chali informs that Achan Karun forbade all of his students to practise it and limited the number of participants to a

³⁰² The book here is summarizing the following passage from Ps V 73: But is it possible to make a gift to the two *saṅghas* headed by the Buddha once the Tathāgata has reached *parinibbāna*? It is. How? For by placing an image containing relics on a seat in front of the two *saṅghas*, and by setting up a table and then making an offering of water, etc., by giving everything first to the Teacher, [the gift] should be given to both *saṅghas*. In this case, what should be done with what is given to the Teacher? It should be given to the monk who performs the duty of looking after the Teacher. For the father’s property is allotted to the son, and this applies also in giving to the *saṅgha*. But when ghee and oil are acquired the lamps should be lit; when cloth is acquired banners should be raised.

(Ps V 73: *kiṃ pana tathāgate parinibbute buddhappamukhassa ubhatosaṅghassa dānaṃ dātum sakkāti? sakkā. kathaṃ? ubhatosaṅghassa hi pamukhe sadhātukaṃ paṭimaṃ āsane ṭhapetvā ādhāraṃ ṭhapetvā dakkhiṇodakaṃ ādiṃ katvā sabbaṃ satthu paṭhamaṃ datvā ubhatosaṅghassa dātappaṃ, evaṃ buddhappamukhassa ubhatosaṅghassa dānaṃ dinnam nāma hoti. tattha yaṃ satthu dinnam, taṃ kiṃ kātappaṃ ti? yo satthāraṃ paṭijaggati vattasampanno bhikkhu, tassa dātappaṃ. pitusantakaṃ hi puttassa pāpuṇāti, bhikkhusaṅghassa dātum pi vaṭṭati, sappitelāni pana gahetvā dīpā jalitabbā, sātakaṃ gahetvā paṭākā āropetabbā ti).* I thank Rupert Gethin for his help with the translation of this passage.

small group of pupils (Chali Chotsuwan, May 12, 2017, e-mail message to the author). He asserts that the purpose of the offering is in order to provide strength and to inspire Achan Karun and his students to continue to practise and teach Sammā Arahaṃ meditation, and not for the sake of financial gains or to attract a large number of followers (Chali Chotsuwan, May 12, 2017, e-mail message to the author). Achan Bancha (2017), who neither has any direct teacher nor belongs to a Sammā Arahaṃ lineage, taught himself how to perform it.

4.7 Apologetic works by other Sammā Arahaṃ lineages and the Suk Kai Thuean tradition

Achan Sermchai is not the only person to have produced a scholastic defence of the Sammā Arahaṃ tradition. Phra Khru Bhavanāmaṅgala (Wiwat Katavaḍḍhano), the abbot of Wat Pa Charoen Thammakai, Roi Et province, also compiled the book *Tam roi thammakai* or ‘*Tracing dhammakāya*’, first published in 2003, which attempts to list all references to the word *dhammakāya* from all possible sources he has found (Wiwat 2003). Achan Wiwat does not state his intention in compiling it, but it is my opinion that it was to provide Sammā Arahaṃ meditation with further links with the Theravāda textual tradition and Thai Buddhist heritage. As I mentioned in Chapter two, Achan Wiwat (2003: 11–16) and his father, whom he calls Luang Pho Sai, are immediate students of Luang Pho Sot and Phra Ratchaphromathen, who was the deputy abbot of Wat Paknam and Achan Sermchai’s meditation teacher.

The Dhammachai International Research Institute (DIRI) published a similar scholastic defence in 2014 titled *Lakthan thammakai nai khamphi phut boran nung (Evidence of dhammakāya in ancient Buddhist texts: Volume 1)*.³⁰³ The book was written by a group of researchers headed by a monk at the Dhammakaya Temple, Phra Khru Withetsuthamyan (Sutham Sudhammo), and edited by Chanida Jantrasrisalai. Other contributors to the book include Phra Kiattisak Kittipanyo, Chaisit Suwanvarangkul, Supranee Panitchayapong and Kitchai Urkasame, all of whom are researchers and scholars at the institute. The book provides evidence of *dhammakāya* in ancient texts and manuscripts found in Gandhāra, central Asia, China and Southeast Asia.

In the preface to the book, Phra Khru Withetsuthamyan³⁰⁴ states that this book is part of a project initiated by Phra Dhammajayo ‘to conduct research into evidence of *dhammakāya* in ancient Buddhist texts’ (Chanida 2014: preface). The aim of this project is ‘to act as a lawyer who defends on behalf of Buddhism’ in order to create social acceptance, especially within the Buddhist Studies community (Chanida 2014: preface). Chanida Jantrasrisalai informs me that this book and other publications by the DIRI, such as *Questions-answers regarding dhammakāya 1*, mentioned above, are intended to counter criticisms that Dhammakāya (Sammā Arahaṃ) meditation is not Buddhism or is a distortion of the Dhamma (Chanida Jantrasrisalai, September 11, 2017, e-mail message to the author). However, she asserts that this book does not intend to provide evidence of possible precursors to Dhammakāya (Sammā Arahaṃ) meditation as the DIRI’s research does not

³⁰³ หลักฐานธรรมกายในคัมภีร์พุทธโบราณ๑.

³⁰⁴ His monastic title as of September 2017 is Phra Suthamyanwithet.

touch upon this subject (Chanida Jantrasrisalai, September 11, 2017, e-mail message to the author).

The book is the first published so far in the series. The first chapter consists of the background, objective and hypothesis of the research; the second chapter deals with Luang Pho Sot's biography, an outline of Sammā Arahaṃ meditation and prior research on *dharmakāya* by Thai monks and scholars, which includes Achan Wiwat's *Tracing dharmakāya*. The third chapter provides evidence of *dharmakāya/dharmakāya* in non-Theravāda texts and manuscripts found in Gandhāra, central Asia and China, including references to the Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra, Aṅgulimālīya Sūtra, Śrīmālādevīsīṃhanāda Sūtra, Bodhisattvapīṭaka Sūtra, Samādhirāja Sūtra, The Perfection of Wisdom literature, The Golden Light Sūtra, etc. The fourth chapter provides evidence from texts and manuscripts in Southeast Asia, for example the *dharmakāya* verses that equate parts of the Buddha's body with different attributes of the Buddha and the doctrines of Abhidhamma. The book provides descriptions of the various sources of these verses, such as the inscriptions inside the *cetiya* of Wat Suea, Phitsanulok province; a nineteenth-century palm leaf manuscript at Wat Phra Chetuphon (Wat Pho), Bangkok; a palm leaf manuscript at Wat Pasak Noi, Chiang Mai; a Lanna Mūlakammaṭṭhāna text at Wat Pa Mueat, Nan; a meditation book at Wat Chetpon, Kampong Cham, Cambodia, etc. It also provides references to *dharmakāya* in Caturārakkhā, a chanting text popular in Sri Lanka and northern Thailand. The references to the above Mahāyāna sources, the *dharmakāya* verses and the text Caturārakkhā are not found in Achan Sermchai's works.

The Suk Kai Thuean tradition also attempted to align itself with the Pāli canon and the Visuddhimagga. In 2007, Luang Pho Wira Ṭhānavīro (Phra Khru Sitthisangwon), the meditation teacher at Wat Ratchasittharam, published a book titled *Samatha vipassanā meditation from the Tipiṭaka according to the (Theravāda) Kammathan Matchima Baep Lamdap of Supreme Patriarch (Suk Kai Thuean)*.³⁰⁵ This book consists of descriptions of the foundational stages of Suk Kai Thuean meditation and a compilation of excerpts from the various *suttas* in the Pāli canon and the Visuddhimagga on the different topics regarding *samatha* and *vipassanā* meditation.³⁰⁶ From the title and the content of this book, it is clear that Luang Pho Wira is attempting to demonstrate that the tradition is based on the Pāli canonical texts and the Visuddhimagga, perhaps as a response to criticisms from other meditation traditions and/or its decline in popularity. Each relatively short description of the system is separated by a lengthy explanation taken from various excerpts from the Pāli texts. Many aspects of the so-called *borān kammaṭṭhāna* tradition found in the Chai Yasothonrat anthology are omitted and downplayed in this book. The connections associated with the sacred syllables of ‘*namo buddhāya*’ are omitted. The diagrams of the bases and the elements, the details of visualization and their application to healing are not mentioned either. Interestingly, the book does not emphasize *satipaṭṭhānas* and does not describe them as the ‘only path’ to *nibbāna*. Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta is cited in the fourth

³⁰⁵ สมณะวิปัสสนาจากพระไตรปิฎก ตามแนวกรรมฐานมัชฌิมา แบบลำดับ (เถรวาท) ของสมเด็จพระสังฆราช (สุก โกเถื่อน).

³⁰⁶ The 384-page book is divided into four sections: 1) Gateway to meditation; 2. Practice; 3) Six *abhiññā*; and 4) Meditations on rules of training. The first part consists of preparation for meditation. The second is the longest section (over 200 pages) and consists of descriptions of Suk Kai Thuen’s meditation regarding the five joys: pleasurable concentration, mindfulness of breathing, *kaṣiṇa* meditation, meditation on ugliness and loving-kindness meditation. The third section is the shortest section and consists of short explanations regarding the six higher knowledges, and the last part seems to be a miscellaneous section comprising *dhutaṅga* and alms-collecting guidelines, mantras, *parittas* and more summaries and excerpts from Pāli texts regarding various topics such as the seven purifications, the Eightfold Noble Path, the seven factors of enlightenment, etc.

section, near the end of the book, and *ekāyanamagga* is given a partial transliteration of ‘this way is the *eka* place’ (Wira Ṭhānavīro 2007: 349).³⁰⁷ It is my opinion that this translation is intentional as the Suk Kai Thuean system does not take *satipaṭṭhānas* as its central practice like the Rise and Fall and Sammā Arahaṃ methods.

³⁰⁷ หนทางนี้เป็นที่ไปอันเอก.

Conclusion

Luang Pho Sot, in the Sermon titled ‘Ratana Sutta’ given in 1954, states:

If the Buddha had not been born into this world, this Dhamma would not have been taught. No one would have explained it. No one would have heard it. Even so, [the Dhamma] that was shown ceased for almost 2,000 years, and reappeared again at Wat Paknam. (*Compilation of Dhamma sermons* 2012: 421)³⁰⁸

With regard to this statement, Achan Wira Gaṇuttamo, the late deputy abbot and head of meditation at Wat Paknam, in his biography of Luang Pho Sot, writes:

Dhammakāya meditation, the *dhammakāya* and the Dhamma that Luang Pho attained are profound [...]. Although the meditation existed during the time of the Buddha and was handed down for a period of time, there was a lapse when it was not taught by anyone for a thousand years. (*63 Sermons* 1984: (56))³⁰⁹

These two passages provide the origins of the claim that Luang Pho Sot ‘rediscovered’ the meditation method of the Buddha, which had been lost sometime in the 500 years after his

³⁰⁸ พระพุทธเจ้าไม่เกิดขึ้นในโลกก็ธรรมอันนี้ไม่มีใครแสดง ไม่มีใครบอก ไม่มีใครเล่าให้ฟัง ถึงกระนั้นที่เกิดขึ้นแล้วก็ดับเสียเกือบ ๒,๐๐๐ ปี มาเกิดขึ้นที่วัดปากน้ำนี้แล้ว.

³⁰⁹ วิชชาธรรมกาย กายธรรม ธรรมดังที่หลวงพ่อบรรลุรู้เห็นและเป็นนั้น สิกขัง [...] วิชชาแม้ดำรงอยู่ครั้งสมัยพุทธกาลและสืบทอดกันมาอีกระยะหนึ่ง แต่ก็เว้นว่างไปมิได้มีผู้สอนวิชานี้อีกนับเป็นพันปี.

death. However, Luang Pho Sot did not elaborate on the details of what exactly had ceased and what exactly reappeared at Wat Paknam. The lengths of time that the Dhamma has ceased in both accounts also do not agree and appear to be given as rough estimates. Various teachers and practitioners of the Sammā Arahaṃ tradition interpret this claim differently. Chali Chotsuwan, a lay meditation teacher and student of Achan Karun Bunmanut, claims that this rediscovery refers to the practice of purifying the mind by stopping the mind still at the centre of the body and discovering inner spheres and inner bodies within the *dhamma* sphere (Chali Chotsuwan, May 12, 2017, e-mail message to the author). Chanida Jantrasrisalai, a member of the Dhammachai Research Institute, claims that this refers to the level of *dhammakāya gotrabhū* onwards, while the inner spheres and inner lower mundane bodies are found in various meditation traditions during the time that the ‘knowledge’ (*witcha*) of the full *dhammakāya* system had ceased (Chanida Jantrasrisalai, September 11, 2017, e-mail message to the author). Achan Sermchai (2016), however, states that the lost teachings refer only to the highest level of Sammā Arahaṃ meditation, beyond the 18-body level and beyond the attainment of *dhammakāya arahatta*. He believes that the practitioners of other meditation systems can also reach *dhammakāya arahatta* and *nibbāna* as well (Sermchai 2016).

This dissertation’s findings do not attempt to disprove or contradict any of these claims but to argue that Sammā Arahaṃ meditation, like all other Buddhist meditation systems, was not developed in a vacuum. It is the product of various sources, texts, teachings, meditation methods and manuals that claim to stretch back to the ancient past. Moreover, it was not

static but went through a process of change and development, taking in ideas and practices from these sources, interacting with them and adapting them.

As I have argued in this dissertation, one of these sources is undoubtedly the canonical text of the Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta. The evidence of Luang Pho Sot's initial interests in the Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta in the autobiography is not a later interpolation. This account and the references to the *sutta* and *satipaṭṭhāna* practice in two of his earliest surviving sermons provide support for the argument that Luang Pho Sot developed Sammā Arahaṃ meditation with the Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta in mind from the very beginning, and certainly prior to the introduction of Rise and Fall meditation into Thailand.

However, the centrality of Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta in Sammā Arahaṃ meditation was not a major break from Thai traditional meditation practices, as the characterization of the four *satipaṭṭhānas* as the only path to *nibbāna* was already present in Thailand prior to Sammā Arahaṃ meditation, and was held by influential Thammayut figures such as Phra Upāli Khunupamachan (Chan Siricando) and Phra Winairakkhit, a Thammayut monk who was ordained by King Mongkut. Moreover, as my research into Luang Pho Niam's and Luang Pho Nong's meditation teachings has shown, Luang Pho Sot's focus on the Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta demonstrates a shift from Luang Pho Niam's and Luang Pho Nong's *kāyagatāsati*-centred practice to *satipaṭṭhāna*-centred practice. Luang Pho Sot extended Luang Pho Niam's and Luang Pho Nong's practice of mindfulness to include not just the inner bodies but also feelings, *cittas* and *dhammas* of those inner bodies. This interpretation of the Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta is understood by Luang Pho Sot as providing

the meditative reading of the *sutta*. Luang Pho Sot sees the practices as laid out in the *sutta* as examples and guidelines, not an exhaustive list of practices; for Luang Pho Sot, their scope can be widened according to the practitioner's level of attainment. Luang Pho Niam's and Luang Pho Nong's interpretation of *kāyagatāsati* regarding the hierarchy of inner bodies and the maintaining of one's body to be as radiant as those of *devas*, *brahmās* and the noble ones are major influences on Luang Pho Sot's development of the 18-body system, and the different levels of *dhammakāyas* as corresponding to the different types of *ariyapuggalas*. Moreover, Luang Pho Niam's and Luang Pho Nong's understanding of *nibbāna* as a special *deva* state that is higher than *brahmā* and beyond *saṃsāra* is also an influence on Luang Pho Sot's understanding of *nibbāna* as the dwelling place of the *dhammakāyas* of the Buddhas and *arahants*. Luang Pho Niam's and Luang Pho Nong's influence on Sammā Arahaṃ meditation seems to be greater than Saṅgharāja Suk Kai Thuean's influence as the latter's influence is confirmed to be the *sammā arahaṃ* mantra, the visions of the *dhamma* sphere, the bodily bases, and the vision of one's inner body decorated with a crown, a necklace and a breast chain. The vision of the meditator's inner body decorated with a crown, a necklace and a breast chain is the most significant aspect in Saṅgharāja Suk Kai Thuean's system as it became an influence on Luang Pho Sot's understanding of inner *deva* bodies.

The least influential of the confirmed sources is Wat Pradusongtham's current meditation system. The aspects of this system that are similar to Sammā Arahaṃ meditation, namely the recitation of '*sammā phra arahaṃ*', visualization of a light sphere and the bodily bases, are also present in Saṅgharāja Suk Kai Thuean's system and are common characteristics

of *borān kammaṭṭhāna* found in many systems of the tradition. In the light of these recurring aspects, it is clear that these common elements in Sammā Arahaṃ meditation are not derived from a single source but are the outcomes of Luang Pho Sot having been trained in a number of *borān kammaṭṭhāna* systems, not only at Wat Ratchasittharam and Wat Pradusongtham but also at other temples as well. As mentioned above, the visualization of the sphere *nimitta* around the stomach is also taught by another teacher of Luang Pho Sot, namely Achan Sing, Wat Lakhontham, the one who invited Luang Pho Sot to become a meditation teacher of his tradition.

According to the available evidence, Luang Pho Sot appears to be among the first Thai meditation teachers of his time to incorporate the Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta and the scheme of the four *satipaṭṭhānas* as a central text and practice of his meditation system. There is some evidence of the existence of single manuscripts of the Pāli Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta and their translations at the time. Yet all the available Thai meditation manuals and teachings prior to Sammā Arahaṃ meditation, while mentioning practices found in the Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta, do so in the context of a variety of other canonical and non-canonical practices. Explicit mention of the *sutta* is rarely found, and when these manuals and teachings refer to the four *satipaṭṭhānas* directly, they are usually referred to in passing and among various other practices. This may be because when these manuals were being composed, they did not need to conform to the Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta in order to provide what they thought was the most correct form of meditation practice as the understanding that the practice set out in this *sutta* constituted the only path to *nibbāna* was not at that time so prevalent in Thailand.

Thus, while Sammā Arahaṃ meditation borrowed elements from various older traditional meditation practices and systems, it does not correspond in any simple or straightforward way to any one particular traditional form. Despite all these findings, many aspects remain unique to the Sammā Arahaṃ system. These include the 18-body system; the inclusion of the coarse and refined inner bodies; the usage of the terms *dhammānupassanā satipaṭṭhāna*, *sīla*, *samādhi*, *paññā*, *vimutti* and *vimuttiñāṇadassana* to refer to the inner spheres; the vision of *dhammakāya* as appearing like a translucent Buddha image; the description of *dhammakāya* as permanent, happiness and self (*attā*); and the understanding of *nibbāna* as an *āyatana* or the unconditioned realm of the enlightened ones' *dhammakāyas*. Moreover, the highest level, beyond the 18-body system, which this dissertation does not touch on, also contains aspects that are unique to the system. Some of these aspects could be attributed to Luang Pho Sot's independent development, i.e. thoughts and practices deriving from his own meditative visions and understanding.

The second half of this dissertation accounts for the development of various lineages, networks and centres of Sammā Arahaṃ tradition after the death of Luang Pho Sot, focusing on Achan Sermchai and Wat Luang Pho Sot Thammakayaram. The section also discusses two important figures of the tradition: 1) *mae chi* Thongsuk Samdaengpan, the meditation teacher of *mae chi* Chan Khon Nokyung and Achan Karun Bunmanut; and 2) Achan Wira Gaṇuttamo, the meditation teacher of Achan Sermchai. It also mentions one of the teachers recognized by Wat Paknam, Phra Khru Phawana Sitthikhun (Bancha Sirivijjaya), the abbot of Wat Mongkhonthep, Chachoengsao, who claims that his training

of Sammā Arahaṃ meditation has been completely self-taught. The fact that Achan Bancha, who does not belong to any Sammā Arahaṃ lineage, is recognized as a teacher within the tradition shows that Sammā Arahaṃ meditation is essentially a non-esoteric meditation system. The network of teachers and students intermingling and exchanging ideas often creates a variation in the interpretations of the founder's meditation teachings, which originate from different emphases and/or personal interpretations of the teachers. Sometimes this resulted in new practices being introduced by the teachers and students themselves. A clear example of this is the practice of offering food directly to the Buddha in (*āyatana*) *nibbāna* discussed in Chapter 4.6 of this research, which incorporates material from my interview with *mae chi* Wanchai Chukon, one of the few remaining direct pupils of Luang Pho Sot.

The dissertation also discusses the various negative and positive impacts other meditation systems and their practitioners have had on the Sammā Arahaṃ tradition. It is apparent that the introduction and popularization of the Rise and Fall method in Thailand have not only had a negative impact on the tradition but also led to the view that the four *satipaṭṭhānas* constitute the 'only path' to *nibbāna*, already present in Thailand, to become much more widespread. On the other hand, the Sammā Arahaṃ tradition also benefited from practitioners of other meditation traditions. Under the section on Luang Pho Sot's influence outside the Sammā Arahaṃ tradition (Chapter 3.5), I consider two meditation masters whose teachings and practices were influenced by Luang Pho Sot and Sammā Arahaṃ meditation: 1) Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam; and 2) *Bhikṣuṇī* Voramai Kabilsingh. Both Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam's and *Bhikṣuṇī* Voramai Kabilsingh's biographies list Luang

Pho Sot as one of their teachers and some of their teachings as derived from him. *Bhikṣuṇī* Voramai practised and taught Sammā Arahaṃ meditation along with four other meditation methods throughout her life.

In Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam's Manomayiddhi meditation tradition, one can see the influences of not only Luang Pho Sot but also Luang Pho Niam's and Luang Pho Nong's teachings regarding the different kinds of inner bodies and the conception of *nibbāna* as the dwelling place of the Buddha and *arahants*. Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam's understanding of *dhammakāya* as the supra-mundane body of the *arahants* and appearing like crystal is derived from Luang Pho Sot. His understanding of the minds of the *arahants* as self (*attā*) is most likely adopted from Luang Pho Sot as well.

The final chapter of this dissertation analyses Achan Sermchai's teachings in the context of the changes within the Sammā Arahaṃ tradition during the last three decades. Achan Sermchai's works can be described as apologetic in their systematic usage of Pāli canonical and commentarial texts to provide a defence of Luang Pho Sot's Sammā Arahaṃ meditation. This is done to counter criticisms that Sammā Arahaṃ meditation is heterodox, not in accordance with the Pāli canonical and commentarial texts, and provides only the *samatha* (and not the *vipassanā*) aspects of meditation. At the same time, his elaboration of Luang Pho Sot's teachings can also be characterized as an attempt to reinterpret and systematize Sammā Arahaṃ meditation. This can be clearly seen in various aspects of his teachings, for example: the linking of the basic level of Sammā Arahaṃ meditation to five of the 40 objects of meditation as listed in the Visuddhimagga, namely *buddhānussati*,

dhammānussati, *saṅghānussati*, *ānāpānasati* and *āloka kasiṇa*; the linking of the bodily bases to the various contact points and divisions of the breaths in the Visuddhimagga’s explanation of *ānāpānasati*; incorporating Sammā Arahaṃ’s understanding of the rebirth and cognitive processes into the contemplation of Dependent Origination as part of the mindfulness of *dhammas*. The last of these consists in taking two Pāli terms, namely *paṭisandhicitta* (rebirth-linking consciousness) and *kalalarūpa* (first stage of the foetus), connecting them to Luang Pho Sot’s description of the rebirth process, and then incorporating the rebirth and cognitive processes into the interpretations of the 12 links of Dependent Origination over three lives and in one single moment.

With regard to Achan Sermchai’s elaboration of Sammā Arahaṃ’s understanding of the Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta, I discerned a four-tier system in Achan Sermchai’s teachings of *satipaṭṭhānas*, in which the meditator is able to practise *satipaṭṭhāna* at four different stages of Sammā Arahaṃ meditation from the very beginning to the most advanced stages. Achan Sermchai understands *satipaṭṭhāna* practices similarly to Luang Pho Sot, Phra Phromuni (Phin Suvaco) and Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam, namely that the scope of contemplation can be widened according to the practitioner’s level of attainment. He explained to me that ‘*ekāyanamagga*’ is like ‘a huge highway’ rather than ‘a small alley’, and so *satipaṭṭhāna* practices must be interpreted as encompassing all the teachings of the Buddha (Sermchai 2015). This view resulted in Achan Sermchai incorporating the practice of the four *satipaṭṭhānas* at the basic preliminary level of Sammā Arahaṃ meditation, prior to the attainment of the *dhamma* sphere and access concentration. In doing so, Achan Sermchai reinterprets Sammā Arahaṃ meditation by bringing a ‘bare insight’ technique into its basic

level and thus bringing this level of Sammā Arahaṃ meditation closer to Burmese *vipassanā* methods. At the higher levels, Achan Sermchai widens the scope of mindfulness of the body to include the practitioner's body in the future. The mindfulness of *dhammas* is also widened to the broadest possible sense, i.e. the entire three-world cosmos. These adaptations are made to allow the practitioners to develop a deeper understanding of the three characteristics through seeing the process of aging and death, and also the workings of *kamma* and *saṃsāra*. The widening of the scope of *satipaṭṭhānas* is also found in *Bhikṣuṇī* Voramai's teachings. Here, rather than extending it forward into the future, *Bhikṣuṇī* Voramai extends the scope of her mindfulness backwards to include the bodies and minds of her previous lives (Voramai 2003: 280).

Moreover, Achan Sermchai is also known for his conception of *nibbāna* as having three aspects, namely: 1) the state of *nibbāna*; 2) the holder of the state, *nibbānadhātu*, which is equated with *dhammakāya*; and 3) the unconditioned dwelling place of the holder of the state, i.e. *āyatana (nibbāna)*. The three aspects of *nibbāna* can be seen as an attempt to systematize and reinterpret Luang Pho Sot's conception of *nibbāna*, *dhammakāya* and *āyatana (nibbāna)*. Moreover, Luang Pho Sot's understanding of *vipassanā* as involving a comparison between the opposite characteristics of the conditioned and unconditioned *dhammas* is given a scriptural reference and also elaborated to include the contemplation of the different characteristics of the Four Noble Truths. In reinterpreting and systematizing Sammā Arahaṃ meditation, Achan Sermchai (2017) asserts that he has taken great care not to deviate from what he saw as the essence of Luang Pho Sot's teachings.

Lastly, Achan Sermchai, in compiling and distributing *The handbook of the five traditions of samatha vipassanā kammaṭṭhāna*, which outlines the basic meditation techniques of the five most popular meditation methods found in Thailand, attempted to create harmony and to prevent discord among the various meditation traditions in Thailand. As mentioned in this book and above with regard to the interpretation of Luang Pho Sot's rediscovery of the Buddha's lost technique, Achan Sermchai believes that all the meditation methods based on the Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta are valid practices that lead to *nibbāna*.

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APPENDICES

1. Reigns

Late Ayutthaya

Borommakot 1732-1758

Uthumphon 1758

Ekkathat 1758-1767

Thonburi

Taksin 1767-1782

Bangkok

Rama I 1782-1809

Rama II 1809-1824

Rama III 1824-1851

Rama IV (Mongkut) 1851-1868

Rama V (Chulalongkorn) 1868-1910

Rama VI (Vajiravudh) 1910-1925

Rama VII 1925-1935

Rama VIII 1935-1946

Rama IX (Bhumibol Adulyadej) 1946-2016

Rama X 2016-

2. Glossaries

2.1 Glossary of names

Achan Chap Suwan or ‘Kong Chap’ (1883-1958). Lay meditation teacher at Wat Pradusongtham, Ayutthaya. Meditation teacher of Luang Pho Sot. Also taught Luang Pho Thiam, Wat Kasattrathirat, Ayutthaya; Luang Pho Ki, Wat Huchang, Nonthaburi; and Luang Pho Pluem, Wat Suan Hong, Suphanburi.

Achan Chodok Ñāṇasiddhi (Phra Thamthiraratmahamuni) (1918–88). Mahānikāya monk. Born in Khonkaen. Studied meditation under Mahasi Sayadaw in Yangon, in 1952, for one year. Became the deputy abbot of Wat Mahathat. Taught Rise and Fall meditation method at Wat Mahathat, Bangkok, throughout his life. Taught Phra Thamsinghaburachan (Luang Pho Charan), Khun Mae Siri Karinchai, and the mother of King Bhumibol (Rama IX).

Achan Man Bhūridatta (1871–1949). Thammayut monk. Founder of the modern Thai forest tradition. Born in Ubon Ratchathani. Ordained at Wat Liap, Ubon Ratchathani, in 1893. Spent most of his life wandering through the forests of Thailand, Burma and Laos. Taught Achan Waen Sucinno, Achan Maha Boowa Ñāṇasampanno, Achan Cha Subhaddo, Achan Fan Acaro, Achan Thet Thetrangsi and Achan Lee Dhammadharo.

Achan Sermchai Jayamaṅgalo or Phra Thep Yan Mongkhon (1929-2018). Mahānikāya monk. Born in Buriram. Received his bachelor's and master's degrees at Thammasat University, Bangkok. Worked as a Research Specialist at the United States Information Services, Bangkok. Studied Sammā Arahaṃ meditation under Phra Ratchaphromathen (Wira Gaṇuttamo). Ordained at Wat Paknam, Thonburi, in 1986, age 57. Became the abbot of Wat Luang Pho Sot Thammakayaram, Ratchaburi, in 1991.

Bhikṣuṇī Voramai Kabilsingh (1908–2003). Student of Luang Pho Sot, Phra Phromuni (Phin Suvaco) and Achan Lee Dhammadharo. First Thai woman to have received ordination from both the male and the female *saṅgha*. Founded Thailand's first *bhikṣuṇī* temple, the Songdhammakalyani monastery, in Nakorn Pathom, in 1960. Became the monastery's first abbess. Mother of Chatsumarn Kabilsingh (*Bhikkhūnī* Dhammananda).

Karun Bunmanut (1935–2018). Student of *mae chi* Thongsuk Samdaengpan, *mae chi* Chan Khon Nokyung and *mae chi* Thanom Asawai. Taught Sammā Arahaṃ meditation in Ang Tong and Chanthaburi. Worked as a teacher at Wat Bowonniwet School. Became assistant provincial education officer in 1982.

King Taksin (1734-1782). Only king of Thonburi Kingdom. Born in Ayutthaya. Became the governor of Tak during the reign of King Ekkathat. Defended Ayutthaya before its fall in 1767. Unified Siam and established Thonburi as the new capital. Reigned for 15 years before deposed and executed by King Rama I. Believed by some not to have been executed, but ordained and fled to Nakhon Sri Thammarat where he remained for the rest of his life.

Ledi Sayadaw (1846-1923). Burmese monk. Born in Dipeyin, Shwebo. Founder of one of the two main traditions of Burmese *vipassanā*. Acknowledged by several meditation lineages as the lineage founder, including the lineage of S. N. Goenka. May have been an influence on Mingun Sayadaw, the meditation teacher of Mahasi Sayadaw, and on Mahasi Sayadaw.

Luang Pho Niam Dhammajoti (1828–1909). Mahānikāya monk. Meditation teacher of Luang Pho Sot, Luang Pho Nong Indasuvanno, Luang Pho Pan Sonando, and Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam. Ordained in Suphanburi in 1847 and later moved to Bangkok to study Pāli and meditation. Speculated to have studied under Somdet To Brahmaramsī at Wat Rakhang, Thonburi. Became the abbot of Wat Noi in 1869.

Luang Pho Nong Indasuvanno (1865–1933). Mahānikāya monk. A senior pupil of Luang Pho Niam Dhammajoti. Ordained at Wat Songphinong, Suphanburi, in 1889. Became the abbot of Wat Amphawan (Wat Klong Madan), Suphanburi. Meditation teacher and ordination-proclaiming teacher (*anusāvanācāriya*) of Luang Pho Sot. Also taught Luang Pho Pan Sonando and Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam.

Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam or Phra Ratchaphromyan (Wira Thāvaro) (1916-1992). Mahānikāya monk. Born in Suphanburi. Student of Luang Pho Pan Sonando, Luang Pho Niam Dhammajoti, Luang Pho Nong Indasuvanno and Luang Pho Sot. Became the abbot

of Wat Tha Sung, Uthai Thani, in 1968. Founder of Manomayiddhi meditation tradition. Taught King Rama IX.

Luang Pho Sot or Phra Mongkhon Thepmuni (Sot Candasaro) (1884-1959). Mahānikāya monk. Founder of the Sammā Arahaṃ tradition. Born in Suphanburi. Ordained at Wat Songphinong, Suphanburi, in 1905. Became the abbot of Wat Paknam, Thonburi, in 1916. Developed and popularized Sammā Arahaṃ meditation. Transformed Wat Paknam into a centre of meditation and scriptural studies.

***Mae chi* Chan Khon Nokyung or Khun Yai Chan** (1909–2000). Born in Nakhon Pathom. Student of Luang Pho Sot and *mae chi* Thongsuk Samdaengpan. Became *mae chi* at Wat Paknam in 1938. Founded Dhamma Prasit Group and later in 1978 Dhammakaya Temple together with her students Phra Dhammajayo and Phra Dattajīvo. Also taught Achan Sermchai and Karun Bunmanut.

***Mae chi* Thongsuk Samdaengpan** (1900-1963). Born in Bangkok. Became a student of Luang Pho Sot in 1930. Became *mae chi* at Wat Paknam in 1940. Responsible for teaching *mae chis* at Wat Paknam. Taught *mae chi* Chan Khon Nokyung, Karun Bunmanut and *Bhikṣuṇī* Voramai Kabilsingh.

***Mae chi* Wanchai Chukon** (1933-). Born in Samut Songkhram. Became a student Luang Pho Sot in 1952. Became *mae chi* at Wat Paknam in 1958. Taught at Wat

Khlongphocharoen, Ratchaburi. Founded Suan Kaeo Meditation Centre, Ratchaburi, in 1997.

Mahasi Sayadaw (1904–82). Burmese monk. Born in Seikkhun, Shwebo. Meditation student of Mingun Sayadaw. Founder of the Rise and Fall meditation tradition, one of the two main traditions of Burmese *vipassanā*. Taught Phra Thamthiraratmahamuni (Chodok Ñāṇasiddhi). Acted as a questioner and an editor at the Sixth Buddhist Council in Yangon, Burma, in 1954.

Phra Ariyakhunathan (Pusso Seng) (date unknown). Thammayut monk. Student of Achan Sao Kantasīlo and Achan Man Bhūridatta. Taught Achan Phut and Achan Sing Khantayāgamo. Author of *Book of divine power*. Resided at Wat Khao Suan Kwang, Khonkaen province.

Phra Ratchaphromathen (Wira Gaṇuttamo) (1919–2014). Mahānikāya monk. Born in Bangkok. Studied Japanese at the Japanese Society of Thailand and one year of law at Thammasat University. Became a student of Luang Pho Sot in 1953. Ordained at Wat Paknam in 1954. Became the deputy abbot and head of meditation of Wat Paknam in 1970. Main teacher of Achan Sermchai.

Prince-patriarch Wachirayan Warorot (1860-1921) Thammayut monk. Born in Bangkok. Son of King Mongkut (Rama IV) and half-brother of King Chulalongkorn (Rama

V). Became the abbot of Wat Bowonniwet in 1892. Responsible for the reform of monastic education during the reign of King Chulalongkorn. Appointed Supreme Patriarch in 1910.

Saṅgharāja Suk Kai Thuean (1733-1822). Born in Ayutthaya. Invited by Rama I to Bangkok to reside at Wat Phlap as head of meditation. His meditation method, ‘Kammathan Matchima Baep Lamdap’, is believed to have been the predominant form of meditation in Bangkok during the reigns of Rama I, II, III and IV. Appointed the Supreme Patriarch in 1819.

Somdet Phra Phuthachan (At Āsabhamahāthera) (1903–89). Mahānikāya monk. Born in Khonkaen. Ordained at Wat Mahathat in 1923. Sent Achan Chodok to study meditation with Mahasi Sayadaw in Yangon. Set out to propagate the Rise and Fall method throughout Thailand. Became the abbot of Wat Mahathat, Bangkok, and President of Mahachulalongkorn Buddhist University.

Somdet Phra Wannarat (Thap Buddhasiri) (1806-1891). Thammyut monk. Born in Bangkok. A member of the first group of monks to be re-ordained in the Thammayut lineage. Presided over King Chulalongkorn’s (Rama V) ordination ceremony in 1875. Became the abbot of Wat Sommanat, Bangkok, in 1856.

Somdet Pun Puṇṇasiri or Somdet Phra Ariyawongsakatayan (1896-1974). Mahānikāya monk. Luang Pho Sot’s nephew. Born in Suphanburi. Ordained at Wat Songphinong, Suphanburi, in 1917. Became the abbot of Wat Phra Chetuphon (Wat Pho)

in 1949 and the temporary abbot of Wat Paknam from 1959 to 1966. Wrote a biography of Luang Pho Sot. Appointed Supreme Patriarch in 1972.

Wat Pradusongtham. Temple in Ayuttha. An important *borān kammaṭṭhāna* centre during the Ayutthaya period associated with forest-dwelling monks' division of the *saṅgha*. Residence of Phra Rachakhana responsible for overseeing meditation practices

2.2 Glossary of technical terms

<i>abhiññā</i>	higher knowledge; supernormal powers
<i>achan</i>	teacher
<i>āloka kasiṇa</i>	light device; meditation on bright light or white colour
amulet	object believed to be endowed with powers to protect and bring good fortunes
<i>anāgāmi</i>	non-returner; one who has attained the third stage of enlightenment
<i>ānāpānasati</i>	mindfulness of breath
<i>anattā</i>	not-self
<i>anupādisesa nibbāna</i>	<i>nibbāna</i> without the five aggregates remaining
<i>anusāvanācāriya</i>	ordination-proclaiming teacher; one of the three main monks responsible for conducting an ordination ceremony
<i>appanā samādhi</i>	attainment concentration; <i>jhāna</i> /absorption concentration
<i>arahant</i>	enlightened one; one who has attained the fourth stage of enlightenment and achieved <i>nibbāna</i>

<i>ariyapuggala</i>	noble person; noble one
<i>arūpabrahmā</i>	divine being in the formless realm; inhabitants of the highest heavens
<i>asaṅkhata</i>	unconditioned
<i>āśava</i>	canker; mental intoxication or defilement
<i>asubha</i>	ugly; loathsome; foulness; corpse
<i>āyatana</i>	base; sphere; domain; place
<i>bhikṣuṇī/bhikkhunī</i>	nun; fully ordained female monastic
<i>bodhisatta</i>	Buddha-to-be; one who is resolved to become a future Buddha
bodily bases	different points within the body that serve as resting places for the mind
<i>borān kammaṭṭhāna</i>	traditional/ancient/old meditation; Theravāda meditation tradition(s) of mainland Southeast Asia and Sri Lanka; also known as <i>yogāvacara</i> tradition
<i>brahmā</i>	divine being in the realm of form; inhabitants of the higher heavens
<i>brahmavihāra</i>	divine/holy abiding
<i>buddhānussati</i>	recollection of the Buddha
<i>cakkhu</i>	eye
<i>cetiya</i>	bell-shaped <i>stūpa</i> ; reminder; shrine
<i>citta</i>	mind; thought
<i>deva</i>	deity; god; heavenly being
<i>dhammakāya</i>	<i>dhamma</i> body; meditation system developed by Luang Pho Sot, also called Sammā Arahaṃ meditation

<i>dhammas</i>	states; phenomena; nature of things
<i>dhamma</i> sphere	luminous sphere seen in meditation; termed <i>dhammānupassanā</i> <i>satipaṭṭhāna</i> sphere in Sammā Arahaṃ meditation
<i>ekāyanamagga</i>	one way; only way; direct path; unified path
four <i>satipaṭṭhānas</i>	Four Foundations of Mindfulness; having mindfulness established on four objects: body, feelings, mind and <i>dhammas</i>
<i>gotrabhū</i>	the matured one; one who has entered the lineage of the noble ones
<i>jhāna</i>	mental absorption; meditative state of stillness and concentration
<i>kammavācācāriya</i>	act-announcing teacher; one of the three main monks responsible for conducting an ordination ceremony
<i>kaṣiṇa</i>	external device; object of meditation aimed at developing concentration
<i>kāyagatāsati</i>	contemplation of the body; mindfulness with regards to the body
<i>khandha</i>	aggregate; one of the five basic constituents that make up the human and other beings
<i>khaṇika samādhi</i>	temporary/momentary concentration
<i>lokiya</i>	worldly
<i>lokuttara</i>	supra-mundane
<i>luang pho</i>	venerable father
<i>mae chi</i>	female renunciant; Buddhist laywoman who follows the eight or ten precepts
Mahānikāya	one of the two monastic lineages of the Thai <i>saṅgha</i>
Mahāsatiṭṭhāna	discourse (<i>sutta</i>) on the establishing of mindfulness

Mahatherasamakhom	Thai Saṅgha Supreme Council; governing body of the Buddhist order of Thailand
<i>mantra</i>	sacred or magical incantation; verbal formula
<i>nāmarūpa</i>	name and form; mind and body
<i>nibbāna</i>	Nirvana; cessation of suffering; the release from rebirths; the goal of the Buddhist path
<i>nibbānadhātu</i>	<i>nibbāna</i> element; sphere of <i>nibbāna</i>
<i>namo buddhāya</i>	praise the Buddha
<i>nimitta</i>	mental image
<i>paccekabuddha</i>	solitary/silent Buddha; self-enlightened beings who do not bring others to enlightenment
<i>paramattha</i>	ultimate
<i>parian</i>	monks and novices who have passed Pāli examinations
<i>parikamma bhāvanā</i>	preparatory/preliminary stage of meditation
<i>parikamma nimitta</i>	preparatory/preliminary sign
<i>parinibbāna</i>	final or complete <i>nibbāna</i> ; death of an enlightened one
<i>pariyatti</i>	scriptures; studying the scriptures; school that teaches and prepares monks and novices for Pāli and Naktham (Dhamma Studies) examinations
Rise and Fall	meditation system; one of the two main Burmese <i>vipassanā</i> traditions developed by Mahasi Sayadaw
<i>sakadāgāmī</i>	once-returner; one who has attained the second stage of enlightenment

<i>samādhi</i>	concentration; one-pointedness of mind
<i>samatha</i>	calm/tranquility meditation
<i>sammā arahaṃ</i>	meditation system developed by Luang Pho Sot, also called Dhammakāya meditation; Pāli words that represent the Buddha's qualities recited at the basic level of this meditation
<i>sammuti</i>	conventional
<i>saṃsāra</i>	round/cycle of rebirths
<i>saṃyojana</i>	fetters that bind beings to the round of rebirths
Saṅgharāja	Supreme Patriarch, the head of the Thai <i>saṅgha</i>
<i>saupādisesa nibbāna</i>	<i>nibbāna</i> realized with the five aggregates remaining
<i>sotāpanna</i>	stream-enterer; one who has attained the first stage of enlightenment
<i>sutta</i>	discourse
Thammayut	Thammayuttika <i>nikāya</i> , one of the two monastic lineages of the Thai <i>saṅgha</i> founded by King Mongkut (Rama IV) in 1833
<i>upacāra samādhi</i>	access concentration; approaching <i>jhāna</i>
<i>vimuttiñāṇadassana</i>	knowledge and vision of liberation
<i>vipassanā</i>	insight; insight meditation
<i>vipassanādhura</i>	task of meditation practice; obligation of insight development
<i>vipassanā ñāṇa</i>	insight knowledge
<i>visaṅkhāra</i>	unconditioned
Visuddhimagga	Path of Purification, treatise and meditation manual composed by Buddhaghosa c. fifth century C.E.

<i>yantra</i>	protective diagram consisting of geometrical, animal, and deity designs accompanied by Pāli phrases
<i>yogāvacara</i>	practitioner of spiritual discipline; Theravāda meditation tradition(s) of mainland Southeast Asia and Sri Lanka; also known as <i>borān kammaṭṭhāna</i>

3. Interview with Phra Thep Yan Mongkhon (Achan Sermchai Jayamaṅgalo)

This section is a translation of the interviews I conducted with Phra Thep Yan Mongkhon (Achan Sermchai Jayamaṅgalo) at Wat Luang Pho Sot Thammakayaram, Ratchaburi, on 9 June 2015, 21 November 2016 and 27 March 2017. It highlights his answers to the most interesting questions regarding his life, aspects of Sammā Arahaṃ meditation and his views on other Thai meditation traditions.

Interview on 9 June 2015

Question: What were your main reasons for choosing to practice and teach Sammā Arahaṃ meditation?

Answer: I believed that throughout his life, Luang Pho Wat Paknam's [Sot] conducts and teachings were in accordance with the principle of the threefold training [*trisikkhā*] of morality [*sīla*], meditation [*samādhi*] and wisdom [*paññā*] [...]. With regard to *sīla*, Luang Pho [Sot] was very careful not to violate the monastic rules [*vinaya*] and was very strict in

enforcing them at Wat Paknam. For example, he did not allow a woman to be alone in the same room as a monk and never touched or kept any money [...]. With regard to *samādhi* and *paññā*, I found Sammā Arahaṃ meditation to be both *samatha* and *vipassanā* and in accordance with the four *satipaṭṭhānas*, which enabled its practitioners to reach *dhammakāya* and *nibbāna*. I was lucky enough to have met Phra Ratchaphromathen [Wira Gaṇuttamo], who taught me all of Luang Pho Sot's teachings. He imparted to me everything he knew and did not withheld any teachings from me. His invaluable teachings, together with my children's meditation progress, were what convinced me to choose Sammā Arahaṃ meditation as well.

Question: What is your understanding of the word *ekāyanamagga* in the Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta?

Answer: *Ekāyanamagga* means the *eka* way, the only way, and refers to the four *satipaṭṭhānas*. The four *satipaṭṭhānas*, namely, seeing of body in body, feelings in feelings, *citta* in *citta* and *dhamma* in *dhamma*, are the vehicles that take one directly to *nibbāna*.

Question: If the four *satipaṭṭhānas* are the only way to *nibbāna*, what about the other teachings of the Buddha?

Answer: They are regarded as the foundation of the four *satipaṭṭhānas*. *Ekāyanamagga* is not a small alley. It is a huge highway that includes all the teachings of Buddhism. For example, the teaching of morality [*sīla*], the light [*āloka*] *kasiṇa* and the recollection of the

Buddha [*buddhānussati*], these are the foundations of the four *satipaṭṭhānas*. Each of the seven factors of the Eightfold Noble Path is also the foundation of right mindfulness [*sammāsati*], that is, the four *satipaṭṭhānas*.

Interview on 21 November 2016

Question: According to Luang Pho Sot, *ekāyanamagga* means the centre of the body. What did he mean by that?

Answer: Where are our defilements, cankers [*āsavas*], the wholesome, unwholesome and neutral *dhammas*? They are within the mind. Where is the mind? It is within the body. The centre of the body is the permanent location of the mind. The mind is like all of us. We wake up and go to our offices to work. The mind also wakes up and goes to its offices, which are the sixfold sense bases [*saḷāyatana*], and then it goes back home to sleep again. Where is its home? It is at the centre of the body, at the navel. The centre of the body is where the four mental aggregates [*nāmakhandha*] – sensing, remembering, thinking and knowing – are located. This is where the *citta* arises and ceases and changes from unwholesome to wholesome, wholesome to unwholesome, etc., according to its *bhūmi* [realm]. Scholars often say that the mind constantly arises and ceases. That is correct. But where does it arise and cease? Luang Pho Wat Paknam [Sot] realized that it arises and ceases at the centre of the body. When we are born, when we die, when we go to sleep and when we wake up, our minds cease and arise at the centre of our bodies. The mind also changes from worldly [*lokiya*] to the supra-mundane [*lokuttara*] here. For those who are

about to attain the noble paths and fruits [*ariyamagga* and *ariyaphala*], their minds' *bhūmis* change right here and not anywhere else [...].

When our minds change, our refined bodies also change with them. According to the links of Dependent Origination [*paṭiccasamuppāda*], formation [*saṅkhāra*] is a condition for the arising of consciousness [*viññāṇa*], consciousness is a condition for the arising of name and form [*nāmarūpa*], name and form are conditions for the arising of *saḷāyatana*, etc. Therefore, when consciousness arises, form [*rūpa*] arises at the same time. This form is the refined body within which arises along with consciousness in every mind moment [...].

Consciousness and the refined body cease and arise in every moment. Where? Right here, at the centre of the body. This is how Luang Pho [Sot] understands the meaning of bodies in bodies [...]. The centre of the body is, therefore, the location where one can see one's body in body, feelings in feelings, *citta* in *citta* and *dhamma* in *dhamma*, from the coarsest to the most refined.

Question: Do you think that practitioners of other meditation systems are able to reach *nibbāna*, even though their meditation systems do not focus on stopping still at the centre of the body?

Answer: Other systems are the same. If they are based on the Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta, they are all good. They all lead to *nibbāna*. When they [practitioners of other systems] meditate, their minds also become refined at the centres of their bodies. Whether you practice Rise and Fall, Buddho, or other systems, your sensing, remembering, thinking and knowing,

that is, your mind, becomes pure and attains *nibbāna* at the same place. For those who have not reached the noble paths and fruits, they might not realize it. But for those who have, they see that these attainments arise there. They become awakened at the centres of their bodies.

Question: If the centre of the body is so important, why does the Pāli canon not mention it?

Answer: It mentions mindfulness of breath [*ānāpānasati*]. It teaches one to be mindful of the breath and know whether the breath is coarse or refined, short or long, and to be mindful when the breath ceases. The breath is usually observed passing three contact points: the nostril, the throat and the navel. The mind is fixed at one of these points while observing the breath going in and out of the body. Whether you choose to focus on the breath passing the nostril, the throat or the navel, once you have done it for a while, your breath gradually becomes more and more refined, shorter and shorter, and eventually, your breath stops. Where does the breath stop? It stops at the centre of the navel, the centre of the body, which is also called the end of the breath. In Sammā Arahaṃ meditation, this place is called the sixth bodily base. Luang Pho [Sot] did not choose to focus on this base as it is like having your eyes touching a mirror. You cannot see your reflection, that is, the *dhmma* sphere, very clearly. So Luang Pho [Sot] moves the contact point to the seventh base, two finger widths above the navel. In this way, it is like having a little distance between your eyes and the mirror. You can see your reflection much more clearly [...].

Sammā Arahaṃ meditation consists of *ānāpānasati* from the very start. Luang Pho [Sot] has always taught this, but he has never taught to follow the breath up and down as it does not allow the mind and the breath to become most refined.

Question: What did Luang Pho Sot mean when he said that the Dhamma has ceased for almost 2,000 years and reappeared again at Wat Paknam?

Answer: He meant that when the Buddha was alive, he instructed his disciples to reach *dhammakāya*. The Buddha taught *dhammakāya* as well, but it had been ‘lost’. ‘Lost’ here does not mean lost from the Pāli canon, but lost from the practices of his later disciples. As practices declined overtime, those who were able to reach *dhammakāya* became fewer and fewer. In truth, there have been practitioners who have reached *dhammakāya* up to the present. The *paccekabuddhas* and *arahants* all reached *dhammakāya* and *nibbāna*, but there had been fewer of them, especially during the later periods. Some of them we do not know. Some of them dwelled in the forests [...].

Therefore, lost here does not mean lost from the canon or that there has never been an enlightened one since, but there has not been anyone whose teachings are as complete and profound as Luang Pho Sot’s.

Question: Which aspects of Sammā Arahaṃ meditation do you think is truly unique, ones that you can say were lost and rediscovered by Luang Pho Sot?

Answer: The highest level of Sammā Arahaṃ meditation, after the 18 bodies

Interview on 27 March 2017

Question: Why are the formless [*arūpa*] *brahmā* bodies in Sammā Arahaṃ meditation seen as having forms [*rūpa*]?

Answer: If beings are able to be born without their bodies and exist only as minds, then the teaching of Dependent Origination [*paṭiccasamuppāda*] would become redundant. According to its links, formation [*saṅkhāra*] is a condition for the arising of consciousness [*viññāṇa*], and consciousness is a condition for the arising of name and form [*nāmarūpa*]; therefore, form aggregate [*rūpakhandha*] must arise together with the four mental aggregates [*nāmakhandha*]. The formless *brahmās* in formless realms do have forms, but their forms are so refined that their own eyes [*cakkhu*] and the eyes of beings in the lower realms cannot see them. This is the result of their non-attachment to forms in their previous existences. Only those who have reached *dhammakāya*, which possesses even more refined eyes, can see their [the formless *brahmās*'] forms.

Question: Can those who have already attained *dhammakāya* fall back on their attainments?

Answer: Yes, if they have not completely abandoned the three lower fetters [*saṃyojana*]³¹⁰ and become stream-enterers [*sotāpannas*]. Luang Pho [Sot] called those who have reached *dhammakāya* but have not abandoned the lower fetters *gotrabhū* persons. A *gotrabhū* person is like someone who has one leg in *nibbāna* and the other leg still in the three worlds. They must continue to practice abandoning the fetters and become noble ones [*ariyapuggalas*]. However, if they step back into the three worlds and let defilements, ignorance, craving and clinging overcome their minds, their *dhammakāyas* can cease. When that happens, they go back to being ordinary persons [*puthujjana*] who can be reborn in the suffering realm.

³¹⁰ The three lower fetters are *sakkāyadiṭṭhi* (false view of the individual), *vicikicchā* (doubt) and *sīlabbataparāmāsa* (adherence to rules and rituals).